

WOMEN COAL MINERS: ANOTHER CHAPTER
IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA'S STRUGGLE
AGAINST HEGEMONY,
1973-1998

By

Carletta H. Savage

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Ronald L. Lewis, Ph.D., Chair
Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, Ph.D.
A. Michal MCMahon, Ph.D.

History Department

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Abstract

Women Coal Miners: Another Chapter in Central Appalachia's Struggle Against Hegemony, 1973-1998

by Carletta H. Savage

Women entered various nontraditional occupations during the 1970s, but the coal industry was arguably the most difficult for women to enter and remain employed. Information concerning legislation, the Coal Employment Project, management policies, procedures, workplace problems, and litigation was gathered from interviews, previous studies on women miners, and articles from newspapers and coal industry journals to document the ways various companies managed their women miners. However, this thesis primarily deals with discrimination and sexual harassment. Two court cases, The Shoemaker Peephole case and Bishop Coal Company v. Brenda Salyers and the West Virginia Human Commission are prime examples of the greatest problems women faced underground: sexual harassment from supervisors and gender discrimination in training.

During World War II manufacturers and American society expected women to work in defense plants until the men came home, and industrialists and the government cooperated to ensure that production was maximized and the women were healthy, happy, and safe. Like their World War II predecessors, most coal company executives and their male employees hoped that women would leave the mines after a brief period of time. As a result, most company executives, supervisors, and male hourly employees did whatever it took to force women to quit. This included denying women training and job advancement, intimidation, emotional abuse, threats, sexual harassment, physical assaults, and sabotaging equipment. Many women finally resorted to lawsuits to force their employers to provide training and advancement and a safe, harassment free workplace, but by the time many of these suits found their way to court, it was too late. As supervisors and male miners hoped, many women miners quit soon after they were hired, and the majority who remained were the first to be laid off when the industry began to decline in the mid eighties. Today the mines have been re-segregated and are once again a man's world.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This is a story that the coal industry does not want to be told for it is a story of dreams denied, promises broken, and blatantly ignored contracts and federal statutes. It contains the stories of women who were slandered, threatened with dismissal and bodily harm, verbally abused, and physically and sexually assaulted. Why? They went to work in a coal mine, one of the few jobs in Appalachia where an unskilled worker can make a living wage and have a chance to obtain the American dream. Before I began my research, I thought that information on women miners, especially information on personnel management, would be easily obtained, but I was wrong, for I discovered that coal companies want stories such as this swept away and forgotten like the vast majority of women miners who are laid off from their mines.

Cosby Ann Totten was rearing six children on \$2.30 an hour when she went into the mines in 1976, and when she was laid off six years later, she was making \$80 a day. The chance to make “big money” for their families is the reason why she and thousands of women entered Central Appalachian mines during the seventies and eighties. The majority of these women, largely single mothers previously employed as waitresses, beauticians, teachers, and factory workers, were neither feminists or activists when they donned their hard hats and steel-toed boots, but a decade later their perspectives on both the roles of men and women were forever changed. Whereas their mothers and grandmothers were welcomed into defense plants as Rosie Riveters during World War II under the banner of patriotism, these women were treated with scorn and resentment. Barraged with an outpouring of disapproval from male miners, family members, and their communities, they faced incredible harassment both on the surface and underground. Although many women did not last,

those who remained persevered under incredible conditions. Rosie the Riveter knew that her job was only temporary and that she would most likely return to her home or job at the diner at the war's end, but women miners perceived their employment as permanent. Unfortunately, most company officials and union members hoped that the employment of women as miners was also temporary, and many men went to great lengths to hasten the women's exodus. Their tactics sometimes endangered the health and safety of both male and female miners, and the emotional trauma suffered by many of these women is incomprehensible.

For nearly a century men clung to the superstition that women were bad luck in the mines, and in doing so they ignored legions of women who worked safely and productively in British and American coal mines. When legislation was passed during the Civil Rights era that opened the doors to nontraditional occupations like mining, coal companies and their male employees worked hard to undermine female employment in the mining industry. For this purpose, coal company officials not only encouraged or ignored harassment and intimidation by supervisors and rank and file miners, they also withheld adequate training, facilities, or support. As a result, companies sent a clear message to their female employees that men believed women were incapable of doing the work. Consequently, both management and the rank and file were determined to do whatever it took to convince the women that it was in their best interests to quit and return to the kitchen where they belonged.

Today very few of these women remain employed in the coal industry for as the coal boom ended during the eighties, most of these women, who were the last hired, became the first to be fired. However, they left their mark on both the industry and nontraditional female employment, and for the sake of all women employed in non-traditional occupations, it is imperative that their stories be told. As one former miner

put it, “They want it to be a man’s world again. We had to fight to get there, we’re going to fight to go back.”¹

¹ Interview with Cathy Willis, 15 July 1998.

THE HISTORY OF WOMEN IN COAL MINING

Women who expressed interest in employment underground encountered stiff opposition from family members, friends, and their communities. Superstition was even used as a premise in the argument for keeping women out of the mines since miners believed that tragedy would result if women went underground. Although it was assumed that no women were employed as miners before 1972, women had been digging coal for nearly as long as their male counterparts. Women had always worked in family mines in the United States, and they were employed in company-owned operations in Great Britain and France in the early nineteenth century. Women and children were hired as miners in both the Old and the New World because they could easily crawl into small spaces where full-grown men could not and were a readily available cheap source of labor.¹

Coal was first mined in Great Britain during the thirteenth century. These early British mines were little more than holes tunneled into hills or river banks, but drift mines, shafts driven deep into the earth to obtain more coal, were sunk by the fifteenth century. After timber resources were depleted and agriculture declined in Europe, new industries increased the demand for coal. As a result, entire families worked in the mines during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I with females generally involved in transporting the coal from the face to the mouth. However, this soon changed.²

By the Victorian period, Britain supplied eighty percent of the world's coal supply. More than 150,000 miners worked in two thousand collieries in 1841, five to six thousand of whom were women. Unfortunately for poor, working class women, the Victorian middle class deemed that a woman's place should be in the home

¹ Thomas Barnard and Brenda J. Clark, "Clementine in the 1980s) EEO and the Women Miner), West Virginia Law Review 82 (1980): 899.

² Angela V John, Coal Mining Women: Victorian Lives and Campaigns (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984) , p. 4.

whether families could afford it or not. As the number of looms increased, many women left mining for textiles, but mining remained a family affair that involved wives, mothers, and sisters. As male colliers extracted the coal, females, harnessed to baskets or tubs by belts or chains, transported coal along low passageways to the mouth of the mine. Later, when the mines modernized, boys known as trammers took over the task of transporting the coal and used ponies to pull wheeled tubs of coal over the cast iron rails.³

Some girls continued to work in the mines as trappers, doorkeepers who opened and closed underground doors that controlled ventilation, and a few girls started working at an early age. Ann Bowcraft began keeping a door at the age of five even though the Children's Employment Commission reported in the early 1840s that the average age a child began working in the mines was nine.⁴ Although both young girls and boys worked in the mines, most female miners were young, single girls or widows of former miners who worked twelve hour days without receiving direct compensation for their labor since their wages were paid to the male family member who engaged their services.⁵ Information such as this was conveyed to the public, and the Children's Employment Commission's report surely strengthened the Victorian argument against the employment of women and children. As a result, the Mines and Collieries Act was passed in 1842 which banned all children under the age of ten and females of any age from working underground.⁶ Since the law was rarely enforced females remained employed in the coal industry, working above the ground as pit brow lassies, usually the daughters of former women miners who helped

³ Ibid., pp. 6-8.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 14-16.

⁶ Ibid., p. 41.

prepare the coal for market.⁷ The pit brow lassies continued to work until the 1960s when mechanization decreased the number of jobs available at the preparation plant, whereupon many pit brow lassies left for other work, retired, or were replaced by disabled men. The last two women left the pits in 1972, three years before the passage of the Sex Discrimination Act which provided equal rights for women except in mining since the British Parliament did not recommend the repeal of the ban on women working underground.⁸ Ironically, British women exited the mines at the same time American women were entering mining and other nontraditional occupations under Civil Rights legislation.

As in Britain, American women worked underground as part of the family unit. The earliest record of women working in the mines is in the 1821 will of a Virginia slave owner who listed three women among the slaves who worked his mine.⁹ Later, in 1895, one German miner told a reporter for Black Diamond, a coal industry journal, that his four daughters worked alongside him in a mine. The venture proved so profitable that it allowed him to buy the mine and nearby timberland.¹⁰ This trend continued, and American women worked as their British sisters had in small family mines where hand-loading techniques were utilized well into the twentieth century. However, as their British counterparts previously discovered, economic opportunity for Appalachian women decreased as the energy needs of the Industrial Revolution drew the region into the economic and cultural mainstream. Economic survival would necessitate female participation in wage labor, but for women, doors to

⁷Ibid., pp. 14-16.

⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

⁹ Ronald L. Lewis, Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980, p. 5, as cited in Marat Moore, Women in the Mines: Stories of Life and Work (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), p. xxvii.

¹⁰Carbon, "Black Diamonds," Black Diamond 11 (14 Sept. 1895): 335.

public work in Appalachia would open ever so slowly since mountain society was a patriarchal one where only adult white males enjoyed power, privilege, and freedom. Accordingly, women presided over the domestic sphere where they ran the household, tended to the livestock and the garden, and cared for the children. At the same time, with men often away for weeks at a time hunting, trading, or working, women were left behind to run the farm. Although this was especially true during the preindustrial period, women's responsibility to the domestic realm increased during industrialization as the menfolk divided their time between the farm, logging camps, mines, and other public work. Land ownership remained important to Appalachian families yet increasing property values made land harder to obtain, and equally important, rising property taxes made land difficult to retain.¹¹ In addition, businesses and local governments began requiring cash as payment for goods, services, and taxes before the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, to support their families and pay their property taxes, mountaineers resorted to public work in increasing numbers during the second half of the nineteenth century. Yet men, not women, benefited dramatically as thousands entered the mines, mills, and factories that sprang up across Appalachia.

The increase in employment opportunities rarely extended to women, especially in the better paying extraction and manufacturing industries. As a result, only 5.4 percent (11,058) of the female population over ten years of age was gainfully employed in West Virginia in 1880. Most of these women were employed in the domestic and personal service sectors, with only 1,448 women employed in manufacturing, mechanical, and mining industries compared to 24,840 men. The number of employed women continued to climb nonetheless, and by 1890, the

¹¹ Ronald Eller, Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), pp. 31-32, 43-44, 231.

number of working females over the age of ten had nearly doubled to 21,701, or 8.1 percent of the work force. Employment in the manufacturing and mechanical industries replicated this trend as industrial employers retained over 3,000 women, many whom were single, white females who ranged in age from ten to twenty-four. Still, the majority was employed in industries that mirrored traditional women's work, sewing, weaving, canning produce, glass, and dinnerware factories. Like coal mining, however, employment in the heavy industries such as coke, steel, and the railroads, were virtually "all male enclaves" and largely off limits to women at the turn of the century. In fact, the 1900 census indicates that only fifty-one women were employed in mining and quarrying operations, but their specific tasks are unknown.¹² Growth in the manufacturing sector clearly brought economic opportunity for men, but not women.

Several states had laws which specifically prohibited women from working underground. For instance, an 1887 West Virginia statute prohibited women from working in the mines. Violation was a misdemeanor, subject to a fine from ten dollars to one hundred dollars plus court costs. If the fine and costs were defaulted, the guilty party could be imprisoned for as long as ten days, but not more than three months. The fines were increased in 1890 and 1907 with the stipulation that employers were only guilty of violating the law (1907) if they had more than five employees. This law was evidently written to safeguard women working in family operations, for as I have noted, daughters and wives worked with their menfolk in small, family mines that provided coal for the family's use and to supplement their meager income. The law was amended and reenacted with the provision related to female employment finally

¹² Francis S. Hensley, "Women in the Industrial Work Force in West Virginia, 1880-1945," West Virginia History 49 (1990): 115-117.

omitted in 1925.¹³

World War I brought social and economic changes to the country, and West Virginia women benefited slightly from wartime economic growth as more women entered nontraditional industries including coal mining. Ten percent of the state's female population was employed in manufacturing in 1919, an increase of nearly two percent prior to the outbreak of the war. Although increasing numbers of women were employed in the higher paying chemical (1.3 percent of wage earners) and iron and steel (1.2 percent) industries, most were still employed in traditional women's industries. Notwithstanding, the number of women employed in state coal mines increased to 275 by 1920, the highest number to date.¹⁴ As the end of the war signaled the cessation of the coal boom, employment in the coal industry for both men and women declined, but women were no longer strictly confined to traditional women's industries. They reaped the greatest opportunities in textiles, glass, and china factories, but opportunities for employment gradually increased in the chemical and glass industries as well. Hence, eighteen percent of the state's working women were employed in industrial occupations prior to the Great Crash of 1929.¹⁵

World War I temporarily facilitated the movement of women who were already employed in traditional female occupations into industrial occupations, but with the advent of the Depression, scarce employment opportunities mandated that male employment be protected. As a result, mining employment for women was prohibited in the following seventeen states by 1932: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, but not in West Virginia or Kentucky,

¹³ Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 119.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 120.

states that contained the richest coal reserves in the country.¹⁶ Nevertheless, women and girls continued to work with their fathers, brothers, and husbands in small family contract mines to ease their family's economic woes throughout the Depression.

Grace Aumiller began working in the mines during the Depression with her grandfather in Buchanan County, Virginia. The Jewell Ridge Coal Company hired her to work at their Laurel Creek mine in Sears, West Virginia, in 1938 or 1939 where she helped her father dig coal. Jewell Ridge willingly hired women, and in fact, employed five other women along with Aumiller. At Jewell Ridge she carried coal to the trucks by bucket, drilled holes for shooting coal, laid track, and dug coal. Altogether, she spent thirteen to fourteen years in the mines.¹⁷

World War II provided the impetus for economic growth and a temporary end to traditional women's work as unemployed married women moved into America's factories and mines to replace men who were being recruited to serve in the armed forces. Constituting 72 percent of the increase in female employment nationally between 1940 and 1943, married women outnumbered single women in the female work force for the first time in American history.¹⁸ In 1940 over ninety-four thousand women were employed in West Virginia alone, almost 14 percent of the state's population over fourteen. Female employment in heavy manufacturing and mining increased, but these industries were still male-dominated. Women employed in iron and steel mills quadrupled and 544 women were employed in the mines.¹⁹

¹⁶ U.S., Department of State, Chronological Development of Labor Legislation for Women in the United States, Women's Bureau Bulletin no. 66-11 (1932), by Florence P. Smith, pp. 152, 171.

¹⁷ Elmer Ranich, "In the Mines.... Two Women Remember," Mountain Life and Work, February 1975, pp. 35-37.

¹⁸ Karen Anderson, Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 4.

¹⁹ Hensley, "Women in the Industrial Work Force," p. 121.

As they had for over a century, women continued to work in small, family-owned or operated mines during World War II. Sue Fields of Tazwell County, Virginia, began working in the mines in 1940 when a mine owner hired her father to mine his coal. Initially she picked up lumps of coal for the family's use when she started working as one of eleven children who worked in the mine, nine of them from her own family. Eventually she and the other children did just about everything that the men did: they used breast augers to bore holes in the mines to shoot the coal, worked with picks and shovels, hand loaded the coal into cars, laid track, and set timbers to support the roof. She worked in the mine until 1952.²⁰

In 1974 both Fields and her sister Alice applied for Black Lung benefits. At first, the officials at the local Black Lung office laughed at their request since officials did not believe that these women had ever worked in the mines. However, after the sisters verified their employment, officials gave them the breathing tests and x-rays necessary to determine whether or not they had Black Lung.²¹

Betty Randolph worked with her father at the age of twelve in a "dog hole" in 1946. As a self-declared tomboy, she willingly did anything, including working as a miner's helper, to prove to her father that she could be the boy that he had always wanted. Her father was a farmer who, like many Appalachian farmers, relied on public work to make ends meet. His neighbor, who owned a mine that was little more than a ten or twelve foot hole in the side of a hill, told Randolph that he could pick all of the coal that his family needed to "last through the winter." She and her father used a burro to pull cartloads of coal out of the mine, and after working all day underground, they hauled the coal to their coal house. Betty's father was proud of her and bragged

²⁰ Ruth Church and Cathy Stanley, "Women Miners in the Forties and Today," Mountain Life and Work, November 1974, p. 14.

²¹ Ibid.

to the neighbors about his daughter's hard work and perseverance.²²

Many women worked in family-operated or non-union operations, but a few women worked alongside their husbands in unionized mines. Ethel Dixon worked as her husband's helper in a Harlan County, Kentucky, mine in 1941. Initially, the other men complained, but his boss defended her right to work, saying that if it was not for her helping her husband cut the coal on the midnight shift, they would not have any coal to load during the day. In addition, he reiterated the wartime sentiments of many Americans, telling the men that working alongside their husbands was an honorable way for women "to make bread for their families." Unlike many women who worked for the first time during the war, however, Dixon worked for more than a decade after the war ended. She left after fourteen years in the mines when she was pregnant with twins.²³

Dixon's boss supported her decision to work in the mine, but the United Mine Workers Union opposed hiring women as miners even during wartime. In 1942, a group of women were hired to work on the tippie at the Algoma Coal and Coke Company in southern West Virginia. The women promptly joined the UMWA. The union, however, condemned their employment. Echoing claims made by Victorian British reformers, the union argued that hiring women encouraged immorality. George Titles, president of District 29 in West Virginia, demanded that the employment of women be stopped and threatened to initiate a strike. Consequently, the general manager of the Algoma mine, William Beury, fired them. John L. Lewis declared that the situation was "promptly adjusted" in West Virginia at a meeting of the International Executive Board in 1944. In addition, he appointed a commission to investigate the employment of women in western mines such as the Union Pacific

²² CEP News!, February 1981.

²³ Moore, Women in the Mines, pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

tipples in Wyoming and stop its spread. In spite of the union's attempts, female employment in Union Pacific tipples increased to one hundred, and the commission was powerless to stop it. Consequently, women like Ethel Dixon and Sue Fields worked in the nation's coal fields until the end of the war.²⁴

Women generally left their jobs in the factories, mills, and mines after the war, but many of them remained in the work force. By 1950, women made up almost 28 percent of the nation's work force.²⁵ Married women continued to constitute a major part of the increase in the work force, and twenty years later, with women making up nearly two fifths of the work force, 60 percent of them were married.²⁶ Most women worked full time in white collar occupations, especially in the clerical field. As a result, by 1969 one fourth of the female work force was employed in five occupations that were extensions of work done in the home with most women employed as secretary/stenographers, household workers, bookkeepers, elementary school teachers, or waitresses. Women usually started working after their children entered elementary school to maintain the "good life," using the extra income to buy a house, a second car, or to finance their children's college education.²⁷ However, an increasing number of women began working after a divorce, a time when many women were forced to assume the role of sole providers for their families.

Irregardless of their marital status, as in the rest of the nation, increasing numbers of Appalachian women were working, constituting 45 percent of the region's

²⁴ Ibid., pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

²⁵ Hensley, "Women in the Industrial Work Force," p. 124.

²⁶ Janice Hedges, "Women at Work: Women Workers and Manpower Demands in the 1970s," Monthly Labor Review 93 (June 1970): 20.

²⁷ Elizabeth Waldman, "Women at Work: Change in the Labor Activity of Women," Monthly Labor Review 93 (June 1970): 19.

work force in 1978.²⁸ However, since they lived in a region without diversification, economic opportunity was especially limited for women since opportunities for employment tended to be primarily blue-collar and male-oriented. Central Appalachia particularly lagged behind in job growth compared to the rest of Appalachia and the nation where there existed only thirty-one jobs per 100 people in 1969.²⁹

Consequently, there existed few alternative industries where women could find employment. Thus, with no other realistic hope for employment in an occupation that provided good wages and benefits, many women turned to the mines “for the money.”³⁰

²⁸ Ben Bedell, “Women Take Their Place,” p. 5.

²⁹ Andrew Isserman, “Appalachia Then and Now: Update of ‘The Realities of Deprivation’ Reported to the President in 1964.” Journal of Appalachian Studies 3 (Spring 1997): 55.

³⁰ Interview with Jean Harkins, Carmichaels, Pennsylvania, 24 July 1998.

CHAPTER 2

CIVIL RIGHTS LEGISLATION AND THE COAL EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

Cosby Totten was rearing six children on \$2.30 an hour when she went into the mines in 1976, but when she was laid off six years later, she was making \$80.00 a day. For Cosby, working in the mines meant that she could adequately provide for her children until they finished their education. Women like Cosby were becoming increasingly visible since over 40 percent of all working women were financially independent in the 1970s.¹ As this number grew, women were forced to look for work. The majority of traditional, women's occupations, however, paid poor wages and failed to provide health benefits. Henceforth, if women were to find work that fit their abilities as Janice Hedges stated in a 1970 issue of the Monthly Labor Review, they would have to find employment outside traditional women's occupations in the rapidly growing skilled trades, an area that was becoming increasingly suitable for women as technological innovations decreased the physical requirement of many of these jobs.² In Appalachia, however, the coal industry offered the only opportunity for high wage employment for low skilled workers, a category which included most of the female work force. It would take Civil Rights legislation and laws passed during the 1960s, however, to make employment in nontraditional occupations like mining possible.

Legislation passed prior to the 1960s was protectionist in nature, and various laws directed at women workers that addressed legitimate concerns such as working conditions, hours, and women's health issues. Nonetheless, these laws served a dual purpose: the legislation made it possible to either remove women from well-paying, highly skilled positions and replace them with men or prohibit their hiring altogether. As a result, women continued to be viewed as marginal, usually

¹ Anne Swardson, "Women Dig into the Coal Industry," Coal Age 82 (June 1977): 85.

² Hedges, "Women at Work," pp. 19-29.

temporary workers, and their employment in better paying, nontraditional occupations such as mining was restricted and legally impossible. The debate persisted as protection and equality continued to be at the center of dialogue over women's work well into the 1960s, and as recently as 1969, seventeen states still prohibited women from being employed in coal mines even though this violated federal civil rights legislation.³ Moreover, increasing numbers of older, married women continued to enter the work force, yet the state and society continued to perceive women who worked as primarily young, unmarried, and easily exploited, characteristics which made state protection a must. Although the protection of female workers and their right to work were once considered compatible goals, they were no longer harmonious. Women clamored for the opportunity to gain entry into traditionally male occupations regardless of the risk to their health and safety but were denied entry because of their gender. Society considered this to be protection, not discrimination since gender discrimination was a phrase foreign to American society as the country entered the rebellious sixties. Furthermore, contemporary society considered women's fight for equality in the work place a facet of feminism, deeming it social treason. Unfortunately more Americans understood and accepted racial discrimination than gender discrimination, blacks and whites were created equal, but men and women were not. The President's Commission on the Status of Women echoed this perception. Commissioned by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 at the request of Eleanor Roosevelt, its members established various areas of discrimination against women. However, commission members voted against endorsing legislation that could ensure women equal employment opportunity, because they did not want to dismantle protective legislation. Until the 1960s, few people realized the implications

³ U.S., Department of Labor, Women's Bureau Bulletin, No. 294, 1969 Handbook on Women Workers, p. 277 as cited in Barnard and Clark, "Clementine in the 1980s," p. 900.

and magnitude of sexual discrimination.⁴

Even though Civil Rights legislation was originally aimed at African Americans, women were identified as a minority in the act, and they used the law as a lever to gain meaningful, well-paying employment. The Civil Rights Act was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, and it forbids discrimination in hiring, firing, benefits, promotions, and working conditions. Ironically, the word “sex” was apparently included in the act at the last minute as a ploy to impede its passage. Congressman Howard Smith, a Democrat from Virginia, introduced the word into the act on the day before the vote was to be taken. Some claimed that he did this as a joke that would guarantee the bill’s demise; others, including Smith, insisted that he wanted to ensure that all women, both white and black, would be given equal status if the bill actually passed. Fortunately, the bill was enacted into law for the benefit of both women and racial minorities, and under this act, discrimination on the base of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin was declared illegal.⁵

This act was the cornerstone of civil rights legislation against discrimination, but civil rights activists and labor leaders also lobbied for legislation that would close loopholes used by employers against minorities. The Equal Pay Act, an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act, had actually been signed into law the previous year. Requiring equal pay for equal work regardless of sex, the law protects federal, state, and local public employees and private employers with fifteen or more employees. This was an important piece of legislation considering the long history of women who were brought into various industries to do the same work as their male co-workers for lower wages. The Age Discrimination Act helped many older women to gain

⁴ Claudia Goldin, Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women, (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 189-190, 199-200.

⁵ Ibid., p. 201.

employment in the mines. Signed into law in 1967, The Age Discrimination in Employment Act protects individuals regardless of sex over the age of forty until they reach their sixty-fifty birthday.⁶

The key to entry into the coal industry for women was the amendment of the Civil Rights Act in 1967, Executive Order 11246. Although the act established affirmative action for African Americans, women, and other minorities, it was amended to include sex as a basis of non-discrimination by federal contractors and subcontractors. In addition, the order established specific goals and timetables for women to be hired in the construction industry. Employers who hold government contracts valued in excess of \$10,000 cannot discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, or national origin. It also requires employers holding federal contracts in excess of \$50,000 to commit themselves to affirmative action programs and compels contractors to create harassment-free workplaces.⁷ Although the law requires only that employers make a good faith effort toward compliance, it has been a powerful tool for civil rights and women's organizations concerned with affirmative action. It was the key used by the Coal Employment Project to open the door to employment in the coal industry for women.⁸

If Appalachian women were to find employment in nontraditional occupations as Hedges suggested in her 1970 report in the Monthly Labor Review, they would have to turn to the coal industry. Former miner Barbara Angle published a semi-autobiographical novel entitled Those That Mattered in 1994 about several women who went to work in West Virginia coal mines during the 1970s. Cloaked as the

⁶ Robert D. Moran, "Women at Work: Reducing Discrimination; Role of the Equal Pay Act," Monthly Labor Review 93 (June 1970):30.

⁷ Exec. Order No. 11246. 3 C.F.R. 339 (1964-1965 Compilation), as amended, Exec. Order No. 11375, 3 C.F.R. 684 (1966-1970 compilation), cited in Barnard and Clark, "Clementine in the 1980s," p. 901, n.8.

⁸ Lippin, "It's the Law," p. 103.

character Portia, she grew up in a coal mining family, the daughter of a miner killed in a roof fall. As a young woman, Portia did what was expected of her and followed the traditional path taken by ambitious Appalachian women. Accordingly, she was an excellent student in high school, and after graduation, she attended West Virginia University where she graduated with a degree in journalism. However, when she returned home to southern West Virginia, she found no opportunity for employment in her field. As a result, Portia acquired her teaching certificate so that she could obtain a good job. She taught school and eventually married a local minister and had a child, but after several years she became unhappy in her marriage and left her preacher husband. Since she had already sullied her reputation within her community, she realized that she had little to lose and adhered to the family tradition by going to work in the mines alongside her brother.⁹

Like men had done for decades, both well-educated woman like Portia and unskilled women returned home to Appalachia and turned to mining for employment. Mary Jack Hurgis was a school teacher in Wilmington, Delaware, for nineteen years when she decided to go back home to Virginia. Upon her return, however, she found that the only jobs available to her were were teaching and mining. She chose mining because, unlike with teaching, she would not have to take her work home at night and began working at Island Creek's VP Mine No. 2 in 1977.¹⁰ However, women like Angle and Hurgis were exceptions, not the rule.

Like most of the women who turned to mining to make a living, PJ, another character in Angle's novel, went to work in the mines for the money, the only money to

⁹ Barbara Angle, Those That Mattered, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1994.)

¹⁰ Norris and Cypres', Women of Coal, p. 118.

be made “in these hills.”¹¹ As more Appalachian women found themselves as the heads of their families, they turned to the mines, for as one woman miner put it: “If you’re going to live in Southwest Virginia, you’ re going to be a coal miner or you’re not gonna do anything other than work at the 5 and 10 cent store or be a waitress or a car hop or something like that.”¹² Veronica Marshall wrote her poem “Way Down in That Deep Dark Hole” after she listened to a panel of women miners relate their experiences. In it, she succinctly summarized the primary reason why women “applied in droves” once they became aware of the possibility of employment: “I have to work somewhere, Your Daddy’s gone three years ago, and the rent is due, And I have to feed your hungry ways. . . .”¹³

Most of the women who applied for jobs in the mines were single mothers. This was documented by Judith Hammond and Constance Mahoney in a 1977 and 1978 study on twenty-five women miners employed in Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. Of these women, twenty had dependent children, and all but five of the women were single (never married, divorced, or widowed).¹⁴ A questionnaire sent out by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in 1975 showed similar results. Responses from more than half (130) of the two hundred women who belonged to the union in 1975 indicated, according to Research Director Thomas Woodruff, that there were two groups of women miners: divorcees in their mid-thirties with children to support, and younger single women “who were generally in mining for the long haul, as a career.” Moreover, more than half of the women with children stated that they were the sole breadwinners for their families,

¹¹ Angle, *Those That Mattered*, p. 164.

¹² Judith A. Hammond and Constance W. Mahoney, “Reward-Cost Balancing Among Women Coal Miners,” *Sex Roles* 9 (1983):19-20.

¹³ Veronica Marshall, “Way Down in That Deep Hole,” *CEP News!*, February 1981.

¹⁴ Hammond and Mahoney, “Reward-Cost Balancing.” p. 19.

and for most of these women, a miner's paycheck meant a way out of poverty.¹⁵

Bemoaning her former financial condition, one former waitress who was the sole provider for her family stated that "there must be a better way-here I am making \$1.45/hour and \$1.00 in tips. I can wash off coal black but I can't wash off those damn bill collectors.¹⁶ Cathy Willis was a twenty-eight year old divorced mother of two when she applied for employment in the mines in 1978. Without any child support from her ex-husband, she could no longer provide for her family on the \$3.15 per hour she earned as a secretary/bookkeeper. She knew it was time to do something else when her son came home from school one day with his coat torn, crying because he had gotten into a fight with some of his classmates after they had taunted him, telling him that he was poor. As a result, she applied for employment with Consolidation Coal Company and began working at their Humphrey No. 7 mine in Monongalia County, West Virginia, where she remained for over eighteen years until it began to shut down in 1996.¹⁷ Many women wanted employment in the mines, but it took lawsuits, or the threat of litigation, for many employers to even accept many women's applications, let alone hire them.

The 1973 Arab oil embargo forced both industrial users and consumers to look for a reliable alternative to oil, especially for electric generation. When the energy of choice became coal, a decade long depression in the coal industry ended. As a result, employment expanded rapidly, and twenty-thousand new mining jobs were created yearly in Appalachia during the 1970s. In 1978, the Monthly Labor Review estimated that coal industry employment, moreover, would increase by 44 percent

¹⁵ Anne Swardson, "Women Dig into the Coal Industry," Coal Age 82 (June 1977): 85.

¹⁶ Hammond and Mahoney, "Reward-Cost Balancing," p. 19.

¹⁷ Interview with Cathy Willis, Morgantown, West Virginia, 15 July 1998.

between 1976-1985 in mines east of the Mississippi River.¹⁸ This boom would open up thousands of jobs in the coal fields of Appalachia, and women were determined not to be left out of the employment bonanza.

Appalachian women soon organized to benefit from the opportunity. Some women organized to file lawsuits against companies that refused to hire them, but the very threat of litigation frequently prompted other coal companies to commence hiring women. An unknown woman was hired in West Virginia in 1973, just who that woman was has never been determined, but according to Betty Jean Hall, former director of the Coal Employment Project, she initiated a “revolution in America’s coal fields”.¹⁹ A year later, on August 1, 1974, three women went to work at Bethlehem Mine Corporation’s Mine No. 51 in Ellsworth, Pennsylvania, and shortly thereafter, Bethlehem Steel began hiring women throughout Appalachia as a part of the consent decree the steel companies negotiated to ward off discrimination suits. One of the women was an African American, the first black female to work underground in Pennsylvania’s history. According to Kipp Dawson, a former miner from Pennsylvania, African American women, referred to as “twoifers,” were frequently hired in greater numbers than white women since they fulfilled two affirmative action needs for companies. In fact, when Dawson was hired, there were no inexperienced men in her training class other than veterans or blacks.²⁰ Bethlehem was the first major corporation to send women underground, and by November 1978, it was the largest employer of women miners, most of them in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and West

¹⁸ Nordlund and Mumford, “Estimating Employment Potential in U.S. Energy Industries,” Monthly Labor Review 101 (May 1978):11-12, cited in Barnard and Clark, “Clementine in the 1980s,” p. 903, n. 14.

¹⁹ Bob Dvorchak, “Women Must Tough It Out in Mines,” Dominion Post, 8 August 1982, Box 85, fol. 6, Series IX of CEP Records, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee .

²⁰ Moore, Women in the Mines, p. 239.

Virginia.²¹

Discrimination cases filed by the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights constituted the first known effort to challenge sex discrimination in the coal industry. In a report on women mines published by the commission in 1975, Sam DeShazen, assistant director and attorney for the commission stated that “the mining industry may well represent one of the last bastions of unchallenged ‘male supremacy’ in the employment field.” Furthermore, DeShazen believed that discrimination against women, which he deemed the “subtle conditioning of Appalachian women to accept the proposition that mining is men’s work,” was “blatant and statistically overwhelming.”²² As a result of these cases, the commission awarded \$600,000 to thirty-four Kentucky women in sex discrimination settlements involving eleven coal companies from 1975 through 1986, and either negotiated or ordered cash settlements for back pay and damages for embarrassment and humiliation.²³

The first complaints were “precedent setting,” opening up employment by forcing companies to lift the discriminatory ban on women in the mines. Furthermore, most of the negotiated settlements called for the implementation of affirmative action programs. The first case was filed on March 18, 1975, on behalf of Melba Strong who had applied for employment as an entry-level miner at a U.S. Steel mine in Lynch, Kentucky, in March 1974, and again nine months later. The company refused to hire her both times, and instead, hired forty men for entry-level positions during the interim. The commission also filed a case against U.S. Steel on behalf of Joetta Ann Gist on March 19, 1975. Gist first applied for a position as an office clerk in 1971. She tried

²¹ Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement*, p. 546.

²² Jenny Montgomery, *Women Miners: Complaints of Sex Discrimination Force Coal Industry to End “Male Only” Tradition*, (Frankfort: Kentucky Commission on Human Rights, 1986), p. 3.

²³ “Bias Suits Paying Off for Women Coal Miners,” April-June 1986 Clippings, Box 85, fol. 41, Series IX, CEP Records, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

once again in 1974, but this time, she applied for a mining position. Gist, an African American, alleged that it was “common knowledge” that the company only hired white women for clerical positions and men as miners. She claimed that she was passed over in favor of less qualified women and men for both positions.²⁴

The complaints against U.S. Steel were investigated separately and probable cause determinations were made. The company, however, refused to negotiate conciliation agreements. Consequently, the commission was forced to hold separate hearings to consider the evidence and collect testimony. The superintendent of the Lynch District mines cited “superstition” as the reason behind the company’s refusal to hire women as miners since women were considered “bad omens” underground. In a “Brief for Complainants” presented later to hearing commissioners, the women’s counsel noted:

If this was not so serious a matter, such a response would seem humorous. Consider the Respondent, a huge national corporation with thousands of employees, allowing its personnel selection policies to be guided by an old ‘superstition.’ Further, so important is this superstition that Respondent indeed knowingly violates state law for three years, federal law for ten years, and its own collective bargaining agreement.²⁵

In both cases the commission issued “cease and desist” orders against unlawful discrimination practices. It also ordered the company to hire one African American female for every two white employees hired for clerical positions until 10 percent of the clerical work force was black for the next five years. In addition, the company was ordered to hire one female for every three males hired for production and maintenance until 20 percent of these employees were female. This affirmative

²⁴ Montgomery, “Women Miners,” pp. 3-4.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

action plan was to be in effect for five years. For the first time, women finally had a realistic chance to be hired as miners.²⁶ U.S. Steel was not the only major American corporation targeted by the Kentucky Human Rights Commission however. Peabody Coal Company, International Harvester Company, Blue Diamond Coal Company, Island Creek Coal Company, Gibraltar Coal Company, and Bow Valley Coal Company also agreed to hire one woman for every three men hired until their entry-level work forces were 20 percent female as a result of discrimination cases filed by the commission.²⁷

U.S. Steel Corporation signed a consent decree in 1975 which stated its intention to end discriminatory hiring practices, but like many corporations, the company continued to resist hiring women. Laurie Thrasher, a miner at U.S. Steel's Concord mine in Alabama said that the company stalled in hiring her for four years even though it continued to hire men. In an attempt to ward off the threat of imminent litigation, the company finally hired twenty women.²⁸ In 1977, Joan Bondira and Linda Butcher sued the company in Pennsylvania's District Court on behalf of hundreds of women who applied for jobs with U.S. Steel but were never hired. Their attorneys, Rosalyn M. Littman and Irving Portnoy, discovered that their applications were never entered into the company's applicant logs, and many were tossed into drawers without being processed. Portnoy contended that this created a "chill effect" where women chose not to apply since they believed that they would never be hired. In fact, Judge Allan Block found that for several months in 1997 the corporation's Cumberland (Pennsylvania) mine hired no women although it continued to hire men.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁷ "Bias Suits Paying Off for Women Coal Miners," The Courier-Journal, April-June Clippings, Box 85, fol. 41, Series IX, CEP Records, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

²⁸ Foner, Women and the American Labor Movement, pp. 205-07.

Furthermore, he determined that a “statistical under hiring” of women existed for a two year period at U.S. Steel’s Gary, West Virginia mine. After the case was filed, the company began to hire women, but its behavior toward them was not consistent. One witness said that she was called the night before the job began and was not put through the usual training procedures, and another woman testified that the job screening and training that she and other women received was more rigorous than that of men who applied for similar positions .²⁹

While not the first lawsuit filed against a major American coal company, the Coal Employment Project filed the most important discrimination suit on 11 May 1978, against 153 companies representing approximately 50 percent of the nation’s coal coal production. The Coal Employment Project (CEP) filed a complaint with the Office of Federal Contract Compliance, the agency within the Department of Labor charged with enforcing Executive Order 11246 since many of the companies targeted in the suit supplied coal to the Tennessee Valley Authority, a major, government-owned, electricity producer in the South. The order mandates that medium and large companies holding contracts with the federal government are obligated to uphold Title VII. Based upon a study that documented the extent of gender discrimination in the industry, the complaint asked the federal government to target the coal industry for special review because of its “blatant” pattern of sex discrimination. In addition, it asked that at least one female entry level coal miner be hired for every three male entry level hirees until women constituted at least 20 percent of the work force and that job openings be advertised on local radio and newspapers, and in some cases, television, for at least three days before the they were filled. The defendants included Peabody Coal Company, Island Creek Coal Company, Consolidation Coal Company,

²⁹ Judith Wollmer, “Victory for Women Underground,” Ms, March 1985, p. 17.

Amax Coal Company, Eastern Associated Coal Company, Pittston, and Gulf Oil's Pittsburgh and Midway Coal Mining Company. Within three weeks after the complaint was filed, the government took over responsibility for pursuing the complaint and negotiating a settlement, and the Department of Labor announced that they would investigate the complaint company by company and target the entire industry for review.³⁰

The first major settlement came at the end of 1978 when Consolidation Coal Company, the nation's second largest coal producer, signed a conciliation agreement to pay seventy-eight women \$370,000 in back wages for discriminating against them between 1972-1976 by rejecting their applications even though the women qualified for employment.³¹ Consol also agreed to hire women as miners and to hire one inexperienced woman for every one inexperienced man until female miners comprised 32.8 percent of the work force.³²

Even though Executive Order 11246 was the key to the Coal Employment Project's strategy to help women gain employment in the coal industry, employment was not their sole objective. By the 1980s, CEP was a national organization involved in publishing a monthly support newsletter for women employed in various non-traditional occupations, designing and overseeing training programs for women miners and supervisors, and lobbying for state and federal legislation such as the family leave bill.³³

The Coal Employment Project was born in 1977 as a one person project when staff from Save Our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM) and the East Tennessee

³⁰ Sue Thrasher, "Coal Employment Project," Southern Exposure, Winter 1981, pp. 48-50.

³¹ Foner, Women and the American Labor Movement, p. 547

³² Linda McMichaels, "Women Coal Miners Can Dig It, Too," Daily World, 14 June 1979.

³³Thrasher, "Coal Employment Project," p. 47.

Research Corporation, a public interest group from from Jacksboro, Tennessee, wanted to tour an underground mine. After submitting a list of staffers, the woman on the list was denied access to the mine. The coal operator, who was also a criminal court judge, responded to their request declaring: "Can't have no woman going underground. The men would walk out; the mine would shut down.

Now, if you fellows want to come, that is one thing, but if you insist on bringing her, forget the whole thing."³⁴

Betty Jean Hall, a lawyer from Washington, D.C., who previously worked as a volunteer for the East Tennessee research corporation, soon received a call from Neil McBride, its director, asking her to do a "little research." In her research, she found that affirmative action was not working in the coal industry in 1977 since its work force was still almost entirely male as 99.8 percent of all miners were men. Within days, McBride persuaded her to meet him in New York City where they approached various foundations to raise money to start a special project on "women in coal." Consequently, they started the Coal Employment Project with a \$5000 grant from the MS Foundation to help women find and retain jobs in the coal industry.³⁵

Hall moved to Jacksboro during the fall of 1977 to head the Coal Employment Project and spent the first several months "tracking down" some of the women miners that she had heard about. However, Hall harbored doubts concerning the ability of women to perform all of the jobs in an underground mine and the extent of the interest women really had in obtaining employment. As she met with women miners, however, it became clear to her that while these women realized that there were some

³⁴ Thrasher, "Coal Employment Project," p. 48.

³⁵ Betty Jean Hall, "Women Miners Can Dig It, Too," in Communities in Economic Crisis: Appalachia and the South, ed. John Gaventa, Barbara Ellen Smith, and Lex Willingham (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 53-56.

jobs in the mines that some women could not do, there were also jobs that some men could not do. However, there were no jobs in the mines that some women could not do. She soon realized too that women were indeed interested in obtaining mining jobs and frequently heard them declare: "I could bring fifty women here tonight that would love to get these jobs." As a result of increased publicity on women miners, more women started contemplating the possibility of working in the mines for themselves.³⁶

The CEP soon realized that utilizing the media was one of the keys to reaching women who were interested in mining employment and attracting attention to the cause. When the CEP filed its complaint with the Office of Federal Contract Compliance in October 1977, the New York Times carried the story and released it to others. Thus, although the backbone of the CEP continued to be litigation, its founders quickly learned to write press releases, and hold news conferences. They also planted support groups for women miners that were banded together as the Coal Mining Women's Support Team as the number of women miners employed in Appalachian coal fields grew. These groups empowered women and created local leadership as they met to solve job-related problems and lend encouragement. The CEP also sponsored workshops to teach women how to get a job, the technical aspects of mining, and other practical information such as legal and contractual rights.³⁷ Eventually, the CEP designed and conducted sensitivity training programs for company supervisors, but the training programs they designed in cooperation with the Mine Safety and Health Organization were responsible for helping many women gain employment as miners.

The CEP discovered that women found it particularly difficult to get hired in

³⁶ Thrasher, "Coal Employment Project," pp. 48-49.

³⁷ Hall, "Women Miners Can Dig It, Too," pp. 56-57.

mines located in eastern Tennessee. There were only twenty women miners working in eastern Tennessee out of over 2,500 employed nationwide in 1979.³⁸ Gender discrimination, however, was only one of the factors behind the low number of women miners in the region. Most of the mines in East Tennessee were small to medium operations that preferred to hire experienced miners because they could neither afford the time or the expense required to train inexperienced miners, especially women. As a result, many companies believed that if they were legally obligated to hire women, then the government should provide funds for training. Dale Studer, head of Sequatchie Coal Company, reiterated the views expressed by many manufacturers during World War II when he argued that “the government is trying to make us an educational institution. . . . I’m not against hiring experienced, qualified women, but the government should train them.” To remedy the situation, the CEP provided these companies with cost-free, pre-employment training, but it also provided women with the skills they needed to be in a better position to work their way up from general laborer more quickly after they were hired.³⁹

The CEP utilized a simulated mine at the Tennessee Mine Safety, Training, and Education Department at Cove Lake for its training program, the first program designed exclusively to train women coal miners in the United States. Held during the summer of 1977, the pilot program was funded by the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor and the Rockefeller Foundation. It was designed to help women develop the necessary skills and mental outlook to qualify as entry level miners.⁴⁰ One hundred women applied for twenty openings in the two week, eighty hour program. They were interviewed to determine their ability to do the work and their

³⁸ Allanna M. Sullivan, “Women Train for Coal Mining Jobs,” *Coal Age* 84 (October 1979):168.

³⁹ Anne Swardson, “Women Dig Into the Coal Industry,” *Coal Age* 82 (June 1977):170.

⁴⁰ Sullivan, “Women Train,” pp. 168-171.

level of financial need. Next, the women were taken on a mine tour prior to the final selection to help them decide if they wanted to work underground. Once chosen, they received room and board, child care assistance, and a minimum wage stipend.⁴¹

The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) required new miners to participate in a forty hour safety program to qualify for their mining papers. Once they obtained these papers they were qualified to start working underground at the entry level. Besides taking a course in first aid, the women were taught ways to safely and easily lift, carry push, and pull equipment and heavy loads. Sessions on body awareness, mechanics in both high and low coal, and conditioning also helped prepare the women for the physical demands that the work required. In addition, they were taught to identify and use tools utilized in the mine, especially important since most women reach adulthood with no experience with tools and little technical knowledge.⁴²

The majority of the trainees who attended pre-employment training classes were traditionally men. Thus, training films showed male miners, not women, a subtle reminder that the companies did not think they belonged. Neither group was allowed to see women as co-workers, and the “invisible woman syndrome” was created. Consequently, the MSHA training manual was revised to include pictures and diagrams of both men and women, and the text also was changed to include feminine pronouns, such as she and her.⁴³

The program also strove to prepare these women for the psychological and emotional demands that would be placed on them in a hostile, male environment. To this end, the women participated in training session where they were taught to speak

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Sullivan, “Women Train,” pp. 168-173.

⁴³ Ibid.

assertively and express their feelings without being abrasive . In addition, they were instructed on proper work attitudes and values since many of them had little or no previous work experience. Role playing was used to depict episodes of sexual harassment that they might encounter once underground. The women also participated in workshops on handling harassment, how to respond to negative community and family reaction to their employment, and lifestyle changes.⁴⁴

The CEP sponsored a similar program in Kentucky with a \$4400 grant from the Vocational Education Department. Marilyn Allis, a trainee in the first course declared that the training program “made all the difference in the world” in getting her job at the Little T Coal Company in Anderson, Tennessee. In addition, the program helped her acquire the confidence to endure ribbing from male miners who expected her not to know one tool from another, let alone how to use them. Hall and the CEP knew that if women were provided with proper training and work preparation, once hired, barriers would “start falling if the first few make it.”⁴⁵

Coal executives also saw the value in specialized training programs for women. In 1977, Steve Anderson of the Westmoreland Coal Company recognized that women come to work with a different set of problems such as child care needs, “people relating to people” problems and improper role models. Utilizing the skills and knowledge gained from a CEP-sponsored pilot program, Westmoreland planned to expand its training to include special workshops for women. Anderson believed that it would be especially useful to have women miners instruct trainees in the future.⁴⁶

With the assistance of the CEP, women comprised 11.4 percent of the nation’s mining work force by the end of the 1970s. Women miners and the CEP had garnered

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 172.

extensive national and international media coverage that helped to establish international ties with women workers after representatives from the CEP visited mining communities in Great Britain, Canada, and China, sparking interest in nontraditional jobs for women abroad. The organization also gained the support of the UMWA and the respect of the industry as coal executives responded to cases of sexual discrimination and harassment against CEP members. The project initiated other women's programs such as the South Eastern Women's Employment Coalition (SWEC), a group formed to help women gain employment in other nontraditional occupations.⁴⁷

Unfortunately, most women miners went underground with little or no preparation for the harassment that they would face. Few women reported harassment or even discussed it even amongst themselves until 1979. Feeling embarrassed or ashamed, victims did not believe that they had anyone to talk to or represent them. To alleviate these problems, CEP began working with the United Mine Workers Union in 1977. A year later, they began to hear isolated stories about sexual harassment. Finally, in mid-1979, "one gutsy woman" wrote an anonymous story to the CEP newsletter. As stories of sexual harassment surfaced, women realized that their experiences were not isolated or uncommon, and that harassment was just another method used to persuade women to leave the mines. Just as the CEP had given women the skills and the tools to obtain underground jobs, it also provided them with the means to fight harassment both in the courts and at the face, but keeping women underground would be harder to achieve than anyone realized.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Hall, "Women Miners Can Dig It, Too," pp. 57-58.

⁴⁸ Off Our Backs," CEP News!, August/September 1983 Clippings, Box 85, fol 22, Series IX, CEP Records, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN MINERS BECOME CO-WORKERS

Taking the elevator down a shaft hundreds of feet to the face was a step not taken lightly by these women. Many women felt like Helen:

It was feeling like, you want to cross the bridge but it has some holes in it, you're not sure where to step. It was about like that kind of feeling. You want to go and you don't want to go. You are kind of anxious to know what is going on and what it's like and yet you are hesitant to take that first step.¹

They crossed the bridge to financial security for themselves and their families, but they encountered challenges along the way. First, they had to prove to men, co-workers, bosses, husbands, brothers and fathers, and non-coal mining women that they belonged in the mines and could do the work, but just as importantly, women miners had to prove it to themselves. The financial incentive, however, proved to be the strongest motivation to stay.

Catherine Tompa, a textile worker, wife, and mother of four children, who applied for a job at a Clinchfield Coal Company in 1973, wanted it for the same reason that motivated most of the women to apply for jobs, money. Like the British women and girls who worked the pits nearly a century before her, she knew that she was bucking tradition and societal norms. Although Tompa realized that women might not be able to do the work, she wanted the chance to try.

The people who say a woman's place is in the home are the people who can afford to. We want these jobs for one reason: money. We work hard now, and we expect to be given the same jobs as the men have. If we can't do it, we'll admit we're wrong.²

¹ Constance Mahoney, "Appalachian Women's Perceptions of Their Work Experience as Underground Miners." Master's thesis, East Tennessee State University, 1978, p. 28.

² "Textile Workers Seek Jobs," United Mine Workers' Journal 84 (15 May 1973):12.

Feeling physically unable to perform the heavy labor required from a general laborer trainee or unwilling to endure the harassment by the men, some women quit.

Others, however, were determined to prove that they could hold down their jobs and used every means at their disposal to keep them.

Many of the women hired did not stay. Marat Moore, a former miner from West Virginia, union organizer, and former associate editor of the United Mine Workers Journal, stated that many companies hired women that they thought would quit. To this end, some personnel managers hired women who appeared to be physically unable to do the work or were only looking for husbands, not long term employment. Consequently, many of the women were afraid, but they realized that everyone was watching, hence, the pressure was great for them to succeed. Gwen said that “it was a bit scary because I thought that what if I can’t make it after making such a big deal of going in, but like I say, that’s what kept me going those first ninety days.”³ Sandra Bailey Barber, a miner from Kentucky, believed that she was hired because she was not a “local,” and it was better to risk her rather than one of the “local belles.” Moreover, the two women hired before her did not pave the road toward acceptance either since one took a “token management job” with the company while the other woman married her foreman.⁴

Although much of the work is mechanized, coal mining is strenuous work and especially stressful during the first few weeks. The women that I interviewed for this thesis all stated that they “could have cried” (and some did) during the first week because they were so sore. However, as one of the women interviewed for the Hammond and Mahoney study said, they knew that if they “laid off” for a day, the next

³ Mahoney, Appalachian Women’s Perceptions, p. 38.

⁴ Marat Moore, Women in the Mines: Stories of Life and Work, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), p. 155.

day at work would be “twice as hard.”⁵ Gwen, a miner who began working in the mines in her thirties, declared that there were “a lot of mornings I would wake up and be aching from the top of my head to the bottom of my toes . . . It was sheer determination, [to get up and go to work again]. I just wasn’t going to let them outdo me.”⁶

Janet Johnson worked as a decorator in a glass factory before she was hired by Consolidation Coal Company. She was forty years old in 1978 when she began working at Humphrey No. 7 mine, the first woman on her shift. At first, everything looked the same, “the mine “was a world without trees, utter blackness,” and in the beginning, she was afraid of getting lost. However, like the soreness she experienced, she mentioned nothing of her fears. In addition, the strenuous labor required in being a block layer was particularly stressful for her. “That’s a difference,” stated Johnson, “it about killed me.” Even though Janet hurt, however, she refused to give voice to her pain, and she laid blocks for “a long time” before she trained for other jobs, persevering because she “had to do it.” Later, after spending several years in the mines, usually working alone shoveling the belt line or rock dusting, the mine “felt like home” to Johnson. Finally, she retired from the mine nearly twenty years later.⁷

Jean Harkins was forty-three years old when she was hired as one of the first two women to work at Consol’s Jordan No. 93 mine near Fairmont, West Virginia. Like many other women miners, she went to work in the mines for the money. However, when she applied, Harkins was on the verge of obtaining a divorce from her husband and was already financially responsible for their three children who still lived at home. She never thought that she would get on at the mines, hence Jean was quite surprised

⁵ Hammond and Mahoney, “Reward-Cost Balancing,” p. 21.

⁶ Mahoney, “Appalachian Women’s Perceptions,” p. 37.

⁷ Interview with Janet Johnson, Mount Morris, Pennsylvania, 10 July 1998.

and elated when the personnel department called her to set up an interview since she was holding down several jobs just to make ends meet. On the other hand, her husband and her children were devastated with her decision to go into the mines because they feared that she would be killed working underground. However, Jean was “too damn independent and bullheaded” to back down once she had made her decision, and at this point in their marriage, her husband “did not tell her what to do.”⁸

Harkins knew that going to work in the mines was not going to be easy, and she was aware of the risks involved; living in a coal mining community had taught her that. Miners also warned her of the adjustment that her body would undergo, telling her that it would take a few weeks to adjust to the heavy work. She was no stranger to hard work, after all, having worked in various types of jobs that ranged from day care worker to bartender to factory worker. Nonetheless, these jobs hardly prepared her for the pain that she suffered during those first few weeks. Harkins “didn’t get out of bed,” she “rolled out of bed” and felt “aches and hurts” in muscles she was previously unaware of. She also knew that the men would give her a hard time underground, “but it all worked itself out.” Most of the men “were decent” in their treatment, but at the same time, a few did not believe that women should be in the mines. Furthermore, they believed that if they made it rough enough, she would quit. Harkins, however, was determined to stay, declaring, “Well, this old girl didn’t quit.” Thus, she let them know what she would “put up with” and what she would not tolerate. She also made it clear to her fellow miners that she was there to work. Like Harkins, most women were accepted once the men realized that they were there to work and pull their own weight. Once men know this, according to Jean, “they’ll go along with you.” However, after one year at No. 93, the mine was closed, but she was soon hired

⁸ Interview with Jean Harkins, Carmichaels, Pennsylvania, 24 July 1998.

to be a member of the second crew to go underground at U.S. Steel's new mine at Kirby, Pennsylvania, currently owned by Cypress Resources Corporation. Harkins was also one of the first two women to "go inside" [work underground] at Kirby.⁹

Linda Tichnell's brother Dan was already employed at Humphrey No. 7 when she applied for a job. He had suggested that she apply for a job in the mines after she had been laid off several times from her work at a local clothing manufacturing plant where she had worked for fifteen years. Having a brother and a nephew already working at Humphrey No. 7 made Tichnell more knowledgeable about the mine and her new co-workers than the other women who were hired at the same time. On the other hand, nothing could prepare her for the adjustment she faced as she confronted the physical and emotional challenges of working underground in an all male environment, for she soon learned that "there were a lot of jobs women can handle, a lot of jobs they can't do, and men don't like women there." Tichnell had known that many of the men would make her life underground very difficult, but it was worse than she had anticipated. The men often made cruel, disparaging remarks to Linda and the other women, and at first, she often cried after her shift. She realized, however, that she would have to "toughen up and ignore it" to survive.¹⁰

Unlike many of the women who entered the mines with some prior work experience, whether it be in a diner or factory, Shirley Casteel had been a housewife before she went into the mines. She came from a family in which her father, brother, and grandfather all worked in the mines. Shirley applied on a whim in 1978 after hearing about other women getting hired in local mines. As a result, she was surprised when she was called in for an interview one month later. However, Casteel did not tell

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Interview with Linda Tichnell, Garards Fort, Pennsylvania, 22 July 1998.

her father or grandfather that she had obtained an interview for a job at Consol's Humphrey No. 7 for fear that they would call someone at Consol and tell them not to hire her. She informed her father, a mechanic at Humphrey No. 7 who had retired in 1974, only after she was hired. To her surprise, rather than discourage her he laughed, cautioned her to be careful, and proceeded to give her pointers on safety.¹¹

Once inside the mine, Casteel's supervisor immediately sent her to lay cement blocks, a job that was frequently given to red hats (miners in the 90 day probationary period) to test their endurance. "They [the company] really put it to you," declared Casteel. "They wanted to test you. Boy, do your muscles build up." After she laid blocks for a period of time, they put her to work shoveling coal "to see if you had it in you." Nevertheless, although the work was hard, she never minded it, and after a while, she got used to the hard work and felt like she was not really working unless a job required strenuous, physical labor.¹²

Some of the men accepted the women, others balked and demonstrated their disapproval in subtle ways, while a minority made the women's shifts eight hours of terror. One man would not sit in the same end of the jeep with Harkins when she first started working, but that did not dissuade her, because she "didn't give a damn if he walked in." She realized, however, that she had "penetrated their world" and women who could do the same work "cuts them down a little bit."¹³

Male miners resented these women for various reasons. Traditionally, male miners thought that if a woman went underground, even for a brief visit, bad luck would follow, and economic insecurity heightened their fears since after several years of stagnant coal production, low sales, and high unemployment, scores of men waited to

¹¹ Interview with Shirley Casteel, Morgantown, West Virginia, 14 August 1998.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Interview with Jean Harkins, 24 July 1998.

return to their mining jobs or be hired as red hats. Because of this women miners were accused of taking jobs that should have been reserved for men. After four women applied for work at Clinchfield Coal Company's mines in District 28 (Virginia) in 1973, a journalist with the United Mine Workers Journal asked four miners at Clinchfield's Moss No. 2 mine what they thought of the prospect of working with women. Their comments clearly indicated their disdain and fear of the idea of working side by side with women:

"I wouldn't go down there if a woman was there."

"One in twenty-five could do the work."

"They'd have to shower with us."

"Women are just not as tied to their husbands when they start working."

"She'll find another man that she likes better than fighting with her husband."

[They work just for] "cosmetic money."¹⁴

When Bethlehem Steel hired its first women miners for its Beth-Elkhorn subsidiary in Jenkins, Kentucky, in December 1973, the men walked off the job. Although they maintained that they walked off to protest the company's decision to use part of the men's bathhouse as a temporary bathhouse for the women, it was clear that the protest was over more than the loss of their bathhouse. They were incensed over having to relinquish their formerly all-male domain to women. The men said that the women were "intruders," and one foreman agreed, saying, "After all, they [the men] were here first."¹⁵ Nevertheless, the strike ended once the men got their lockers back. Bethlehem Steel was the first major company to hire women to work at its mining subsidiaries, and company officials were told "quite bluntly" by some operators that they were "going too fast in implementing the laws" according to Dave Zeger, manager

¹⁴ "The Rank and File Speaks: Should Women Be Coal Miners?," United Mine Workers Journal 84 (15 May 1973):13.

¹⁵ George Getschow, "Women in the Pits," Wall Street Journal, 29 November 1976, A1.

of the Beth-Elkhorn mine. By 1976, Bethlehem Steel employed 111 female miners and was the largest employer of women coal miners in the nation.¹⁶

Island Creek Coal Company dealt with male resentment and a possible disruption to its production by putting all of its first female hirees at one mine near Richard, Virginia. However, this was also an economical strategy since by constructing one facility rather than building new bathhouses at every mine, they saved money and, according to Thurston Strunk, president of the Pocahontas division, kept resentment at one location.¹⁷

Men prided themselves on being able to handle physically demanding work, and they resented seeing women do the same work and receiving equal compensation for their labor.¹⁸ As a result, women miners were faced with a dilemma. If they acted fearful or complained, they disrupted the working environment, but if they portrayed themselves as tough and performed well on the job, they challenged the men's definition of themselves as "exceptional individuals, *exclusively* suited to coping with the harsh surroundings." In her doctoral dissertation Women and Men Coal Miners: Coping with Gender Interrogation Underground, Kristen Yount argued that women miners "undermine the socially created image of miners as tough enough to handle the physical and social stresses" of the job.¹⁹ In addition, Francis Cooley believed that the entry of women into the mines reinforced the erosion of the traditional image of miners that was initiated by the introduction of mechanized loaders, a labor saving device that was introduced to the coal industry at the turn of the century. This

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Carol Hymowitz, "In the Pits: Women Coal Miners Fight for Their Right to Lift, Shove, Lug," Wall Street Journal, 10 September 1981, A1.

¹⁹ Kristen R. Yount, "Women and Men Coal Miners: Coping with Gender Integration Underground." Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1986, p. 326.

erosion accelerated with the introduction of the computerized long wall, a gigantic engineering marvel that cuts the coal and loads it at the same time. Men half-jokingly said that their wives would never again believe them when they complained that they worked hard, because if a woman could do the work, then it could not be as difficult as the men claimed.²⁰

One miner stated that women should not work underground because it “crushes their [men] masculinity,” thus, when a woman held down a job traditionally performed by men, and successfully handled the accompanying stresses, the “macho” male image was threatened.²¹ Men feared that their if “macho” image was diminished, it would alter their relationships with their non-mining wives and girlfriends. Brenda Brock, a miner from Kentucky, said that wives and girlfriends treated their men like heroes because they worked in such inherently dangerous surroundings. However, these women did not know that most men sat around and did very little dangerous work during most of their shifts. Thus, when women went underground, this hero identity was destroyed since, in American culture, women cannot be heroes. Women miners also seemed to disprove the concept of mining as hard and ugly work, for if it was as harsh and filthy as reported, reasoned many outsiders, women would not be there.²²

Mary Alice Yates of Appalachia, Virginia went to work at Clinchfield Coal Company's Splashdam mine. She said that the only problem she had in the mines was with younger male miners because for them [accepting women as co-workers] it was “an ego thing.” The older men that she worked with had worked with women miners before, and therefore they presented fewer problems. The younger men, on

²⁰ Frances Cooley, “Women in Coal Mining,” Mining Congress Journal 68 (November 1982): 25-26.

²¹ Yount, “Women and Men Coal Miners,” p. 326.

²² Moore, Women in the Mines, pp. 150-51.

the contrary, showed her how to operate the equipment, but they were more insecure about who they were, and this was reflected in their attitudes toward her and other women miners .²³

One miner echoed the opinion of many of his male co-workers when he declared that “women are women and coal miners ain’t women.”²⁴ Nevertheless, as more women entered the mines, both the working environment and the image of the typical coal miner was destined to change. Although many of the rank and file were not ready to relinquish their rough and tough image, the national leadership of the UMWA welcomed any opportunity to present a more positive picture of coal miners to the public. In fact, according to an article in the United Mine Workers Journal (UMWJ) in early 1979, women miners were already helping to change that image for the better. Quoting an article from Time magazine, the UMWJ discussed how the press had dismissed miners for decades as a “strange and defiant breed” whose “psychology [had been] shaped by the harsh nature of his occupation” and “burrows underground amid dust and grime with danger always at hand.” According to Time, miners were not concerned with workplace factors such as missing safety equipment or drunken foremen. Thus, the union realized that if they were going to gain the acceptance and support of the American public, support that was essential during contract negotiations, then it was imperative that they work to improve their image in the press. Since the majority of the new miners, both male and female, were younger, better educated, skilled, politically-minded, and concerned with health and safety issues, the union hoped to successfully convey the image of this new generation of miners to the press. Union leaders realized, moreover, that the influx of women miners could be an important part of their promotional plan. Mike Roberts, a member of District 19, said

²³ Norris and Cypres', Women of Coal, p. 70.

²⁴ Yount, “Women and Men Coal Miners,” pp. 325-26.

that “We [the union] need to publicize the fact that women are entering the mines. That will take away some of the feeling that all of the miners are savages.”²⁵

Unfortunately, some of the miners disagreed with Roberts. Since many men perceived women as a threat to their egos, personal relationships with their wives and girlfriends, and to their financial security, the presence of women underground produced a myriad of reactions. Sometimes it provoked apathy. For example, since women and men received the same pay for the same work, some men did less work. Yet in other instances the introduction of a woman to a formerly all-male crew disrupted team spirit, especially when a man was sexually or romantically attracted to a woman on the team but rejected by her. In addition, a woman who did not like her job or was afraid of operating a piece of equipment occasionally disrupted the normal working patterns of the group since her coworkers were compelled to do her share of the work as well as their own. The stereotype of women being physically and emotionally weaker than men, and mechanically disinclined, further prompted men to believe that women would be a detriment to production and safety. Hence, men believed that they would have to do the work assigned to their female co-workers or the job would not get done, or worse still, someone would get injured. However, they feared that women miners would cause other problems. While their wives were primarily afraid that women miners would instigate romantic relationships, miners were more concerned with possible privacy problems underground. They also expected that the presence of women would force them to change their behavior.²⁶

Yount found that the women’s presence did affect the use of profanity. Profanity was typically used to vent the frustration of working in a dangerous, tense occupation.

²⁵ Bruce H. Joffe, “Today’s UMWA Miners: Banking on a New Image,” United Mine Workers Journal 25 (January-February 1979): 23-24.

²⁶ Yount, “Women and Men Coal Miners,” pp. 323-25.

This presented a problem once women went underground since men have been socialized not to use vulgar language in the presence of women. She suggested that the solution utilized by many men to solve the quandry of women working in a man's world was to discredit a competent woman miner in order to reassert her inferiority.²⁷ Another solution employed by the men was to verbally or physically harass the women into giving up and quitting. Thus, the women faced harassment that was targeted to their gender. The women had invaded the men's world, and the harassment was designed to discourage them from staying.

For some women, it was more difficult to endure the insults and the crude language than the physical pain since some men "made it their business" to learn personal information that they could later use against the women. Linda Tichnell, who had gained weight prior to going to work at Humphrey No. 7, was insecure in her new job, and the weight gain did not help. For example, Tichnell recounted an incident when a man hollered, "There is a cow on the track!" Another miner, who was frequently cruel in his remarks to her replied, "I didn't know Linda was down there." Stinging from their remarks, she went on a diet and subsequently lost eighty pounds. Tichnell and Roxie, a miner who lived with an African-American miner and had a biracial child, endured such harassment from five fellow miners that they filed sexual harassment charges with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The men had written derogatory comments about the women all over the stoppings and verbally harassed them. After they filed the grievance, the women went to the mine foreman, and the harassment stopped once the company threatened the men with dismissal. However, Linda and Roxie dropped the formal charges since the harassment had ceased, and they did not want to see the men, who were all married with families, lose their jobs.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Interview with Linda Tichnell, Garards Fort, Pennsylvania, 22 July 1998.

Cathy Willis recalled crying many nights over crude remarks or seeing her name written all over the stoppings. After hiding behind a stopping and eavesdropping on one man's conversation with some other miners, she realized that he used foul language only when women were present. He, like many of his cohorts, hoped that if the work was too hard, the language was too vulgar, or the harassment became too much for them to handle, the women would be convinced that the mines were no place for women, and they would quit. As Barbara Angle so aptly put it in her novel Those That Mattered, they were "aliens in the world of the underground and freaks to those inside."²⁹

Cathy admitted that she was very naive when she went into the mines, easily falling for the men's jokes since she frequently misunderstood their sexual innuendo. Janet Johnson, who worked at Humphrey for four years before Cathy was hired, became a surrogate mother to her and frequently attempted to keep her from becoming the object of their jokes and games. For example, when Willis began to answer a question which, unbeknownst to her, was designed to embarrass her, Johnson would whisper, "Cathy, be quiet!" In the next minute, Cathy's face would turn "ten shades red" when she realized what the men were really talking about.³⁰

Younger women endured more harassment than older women miners since the men associated them with their mothers or grandmothers. Jean Harkins, who worked in the mines until she was sixty-two years old, said that the men never "pulled anything" on her, but they placed "dirty pictures" of a younger woman miner down in the mines. When the young woman discovered them, she "made a big scene" over them. However, when she told Jean about the pictures, Harkins told her that she

²⁹ Angle, Those That Mattered, p. 207.

³⁰ Interview with Cathy Willis, 15 July 1998.

brought a lot of it onto herself after she reacted so strongly to some of the men's previous antics. Harkins advised the young woman that the offensive behavior would probably cease if she ignored the men's antics. As a result, the young miner took her advice, and there were no further incidents. Jean added that foul language was used excessively underground, especially the "F-word," but she realized that she had "penetrated their world" and would have to tolerate it. Some men guarded their language around women, but others did not.³¹

A few of the women obviously believed that the best way to be accepted as miners was to act like the men. To this end, many of the women made it quite clear to their co-workers that they did not appreciate their language, yet some of the women did not. Janet Johnson stated that the women who came to Humphrey in 1978 after having been laid off at Consolidation Coal Company mines in the Wheeling area were "rough." These women, according to Johnson, had to literally fight to survive in their former mines. Like the men, they freely used foul language and participated in sexually charged conversations and jokes aimed at both themselves, other women, and men. According to Johnson, the atmosphere in the mine was relatively peaceful before these women came and "got the guys riled up." For instance, one women miner, to Johnson's chagrin, told the all of the men in her section how the women looked "naked."³² In contrast to this, Shirley Casteel's crew members treated her with respect and restricted their use of foul language when she was present. Once when a substitute miner came onto the crew and began cursing, the men advised him not to do that "because there was a lady here." As a result, Shirley was really proud to work with these men. Although she endured some teasing, especially in the beginning, she

³¹ Interview with Jean Harkins, Carmichaels, Pennsylvania, 24 July 1998.

³² Interview with Janet Johnson, Mount Morris, Pennsylvania, 10 July 1998.

usually let the jokes and remarks “go in one ear and out the other,” because she and most of the other women believed that “you are treated the way you want to be treated.”³³

Women miners who freely used foul language led the men to presume that it was acceptable around all of the women. Willis, who started to work at Humphrey after these women came, said that they “could have set an example.”³⁴ In her study on gendered relations and the division of labor in the mines published in 1996, Suzanne Tallichet stated that the women miners in her study found that even after they were successfully integrated into the workplace, little changed to seriously disrupt what she termed as the sexualization of the workplace. Sexualizing the workplace and work relations consists of behaviors that signal the prominence of sexual meanings in a domain that is presumed to be asexual. Studies done on women in nontraditional blue collar occupations have shown that most men take part in at least one of the several forms of workplace sexualization such as sexual harassment, sexual bribery, gender-based jokes and comments, and profanity, actions used to make biological differences in gender a prominent part of work relations. These behaviors establish a series of abuses that reflect “a cultural tradition which sexualizes, objectifies, and diminishes women.”³⁵ These women knew that they were invading a male world, and their co-workers were not about to change their ways because of the presence of a few women. As one woman expressed it:

It’s a man’s world. And when I started I knew I was going into a man’s world and men have their ways. When the first women went into the mines, it was hard for a man to change his ways.³⁶

³³ Interview with Shirley Casteel, Morgantown, West Virginia, 14 August 1998.

³⁴ Interview with Cathy Willis, Morgantown, West Virginia, 15 July 1998.

³⁵ Suzanne E. Tallichet, “Gendered Relations,” *Gender and Society* 9 (December 1995): 698-99.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 704.

American culture has historically socialized men to perceive women as sexual objects instead of peers, or in this case, equal co-workers. As I have previously discussed, male miners are notorious for their use of foul language, and their sexually charged barbs and pranks are used to alleviate the anxiety of working miles underground in potentially dangerous situations. However, the function of the vulgarity, jokes and barbs changed when the men directed them at their new co-workers, for if their “macho” image was to survive, these women had to be degraded and put in their place. To this end, these behaviors became vehicles of humiliation designed to demean women and reduce their status underground. In her study on the influence of sexual behavior and harassment on men, women, and organizations, Barbara Gutek concluded that since sex demonstrated in these forms is a part of male-dominated workplaces, irregardless of the presence of women, women were “obligated” to set limits on men’s activities to avoid being degraded.³⁷ Apologies given to women who overheard them using vulgar language was part of setting limits. However, this also implied that there was a difference between men’s and women’s language. Language maintained role boundaries, and if profanity was not proper language for a woman to hear, then, according to the men, they should not have used it.³⁸ The women realized that most men were not about to modify their behavior, yet at the same time some women believed that if they established guidelines on what constituted acceptable behavior, their co-workers would follow them. In addition, a minority of the women believed that if they were to be accepted, they had to act like men. Thus, the sexualization of the workplace and the work relationships stigmatized the women as a group, and women miners found themselves in an

³⁷ Barbara A. Gutek, Sex and the Workplace: The Impact of Sexual Behavior and Harassment on Women, Men, and Organizations, as cited in Tallichet, “Gendered Relations,” pp. 704-05.

³⁸ Tallichet, “Gendered Relations,” p. 705.

impossible situation.

In the novel Those That Mattered, the men made it clear to Portia and the other women that the mine was no place for women. Hence, they did not restrict their use of profanity or “sexual innuendo,” but Portia was not surprised.” She expected harassment, for after all, she grew up in a coal town and underwent “basic training” while hanging out at Whetzel’s bar. At the same time, she realized that there was more to their behavior than “green horn harassment”: The men deeply resented her, almost hated her. “This,” said Portia, “is killer turf.”³⁹

For many women, however, the harassment extended beyond a few jokes or lewd comments. The 1981 CEP survey on sexual harassment indicated that many women endured both mental and physical abuse underground. This survey was the first attempt to study harassment in the industry, but the problem had attracted the attention of CEP staffers two years earlier. Initially, the majority of the women were unaware that other women were experiencing similar incidents, and as a result, most victims remained silent out of embarrassment. At the same time they also feared reprisals from company officials or co-workers if they publicly acknowledged incidents of harassment. The issue emerged as one of the major problems facing women in the mines during the Second National Conference of Women Miners held in 1980. Consequently, the in-depth survey was launched out of the conference to identify the forms and extent of the harassment. The six-page questionnaire sent to women in ten states revealed that harassment victims were verbally abused by suggestive or insulting remarks, pressured directly or indirectly for sex, patted, pinched, brushed against, or touched unnecessarily. They were also the object of off-color jokes, physically assaulted in a sexual manner, leered or stared at in a suggestive way, and

³⁹ Angle, Those That Mattered, pp. 198-99.

threatened with rape. At the same time some instances of harassment did not contain sexual overtones. Instead, they expressed the harasser's anger or hatred. In one instance a woman reported that one man picked her up and threw her against the wall, noting that it was "nothing personal, really, he just didn't like women." According to the CEP, all women workers experienced a similar amount of harassment, but, female miners appeared to be the recipients of more physical abuse. CEP officials suggested that this may have been a reflection of the miner's physical work since the dark, isolated working environment could have also been more conducive to overt forms of harassment.⁴⁰

The CEP noted that the distinction between harassment and horseplay was often "fuzzy"; what was laughed off by one woman was considered serious harassment by another. As a result, they advised women to use their own judgment in deciding whether they were being harassed. Furthermore, the survey indicated that harassment appeared to be less threatening when it was initiated by a co-worker. Although 70 percent of women harassed by supervisors felt "uncomfortable" or "angry" about the incident, only 35 percent of those harassed by co-workers reported to feel the same way. Harassment, noted the CEP, was a "no-win situation" for women, because if a woman refused to go along with the harasser's demands, she could be fired, receive poor evaluations, or be assigned to dangerous or unfavorable work assignments. If she submitted to her harasser, however, she again risked being fired at a later date and the loss of her co-workers' respect.⁴¹ According to 1980 Equal Opportunity Guidelines (EEOC), any unwanted advance, overture or other sexually aggressive acts from a co-worker or employer can be considered sexual harassment

⁴⁰ Sullivan, "Women Endure," pp. 80-81.

⁴¹ "Fair Employment Practices Summary of Latest Developments," August 1982 Clippings, Box 85 fol 6, Series IX, CEP Records, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

when: 1. Submission to harassment is made a condition of employment; 2. The employee's response to the harassment is used as a basis for decisions affecting employment, such as job training and promotion; 3. Such conduct has the effect of unreasonably interfering with work performance by creating an intimidating, offensive or hostile work environment.⁴²

The CEP survey indicated that many women miners endured both mental and physical abuse on the job. Fifty-three percent of the respondents indicated that they had been propositioned by a boss at least once, and 76 percent of the women had been propositioned by co-workers. Smoking underground was forbidden by law and physical searches were legal. However, 10 percent of the women questioned had been searched in a sexually suggestive manner. In addition, at least 17 percent of the women who responded to the survey reported that they had been physically attacked underground. The survey indicated that sexual harassment was occurring throughout the industry since more than 60 percent of the women stated that they knew of other women employed at their mines who had experienced similar instances of harassment. Nevertheless, Connie White and Marat Moore maintained that the survey's findings should be interpreted with caution since a majority of the physical attacks involved initiation rites, such as spanking with a cap board, evidently not considered sexual harassment by most women in 1981. Harassment by co-workers, however, was perceived as less serious than such incidents involving supervisors, with only 35 percent reporting an "uncomfortable reaction." Survey findings indicated that the women felt less threatened by co-workers and attempted to treat any such advance as a joke.⁴³

Greasing, however, was considered to be one of the most serious attacks to

⁴² Sullivan, "Women Endure Job-Related Abuse," Coal Age 86 (August 1981): 80-81.

⁴³ Allanna M. Sullivan, "Women Endure," p. 80.

women. Frequently inflicted upon miners of both sexes, it was part of an initiation ritual held for new miners where they were usually held down by co-workers, doused with grease, and liberally sprinkled with rock dust. The practice was “barely acceptable” to new male miners, and most women considered it a violation. After enduring such a greasing, one woman filed suit against her employer for permitting such an incident and won.⁴⁴ Freida Myers filed a complaint with the Kentucky Human Rights Commission against Peabody Coal Company in 1976 when she considered her greasing to be gender discrimination. Myers and the other women at her mine were stripped and greased before they entered the mine on their first day of work. A ritual that had been previously abandoned, Myers claimed that the initiation ceremony was renewed once women entered the mines and that her supervisor knew of the incident. The commission handed down a probable cause determination, but Myers, the commission, and Peabody signed a conciliation agreement in 1977 that allowed Peabody to deny discrimination. She was awarded \$2000 for embarrassment and humiliation nevertheless, and the company agreed to enforce a policy statement that provided safe working conditions for all employees and prohibited gender related verbal or physical harassment. The commission filed a similar complaint against Peabody on behalf of Thelma Wright in 1977. This case was also settled by a conciliation agreement with the company in 1978. Again, Peabody denied any discrimination but agreed to pay Wright \$2000 for embarrassment and humiliation. They also agreed to reiterate its policy concerning the safe working conditions of all employees, the treatment of women, and to remind its employees yearly of this policy.⁴⁵

Women responded to incidents of sexual harassment differently, especially

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Montgomery, Women Miners, pp. 10-11.

when they involved co-workers. One of Jean Harkins' co-workers habitually placed his hand upon her during their conversations. Since she was a roof bolter at the time and he was a mechanic, Harkins frequently came into contact with him when her machine broke down. Harkins did not mind him placing his hand upon her shoulder, but her tolerance abruptly ceased one day during a trip into the mine in the jeep. He had gotten into the habit of riding in the same seat as Jean on their trips into the mine. However, one day while riding into the mine at the beginning of their shift, he placed his hand on her leg. Harkins, who "wasn't in the habit of [using] this F-word," had had enough and was "teed off about something" on this particular day. Consequently, when he placed his hand on her leg, she slapped his hand and said, "Keep your F----- hands off me!" "That," according to Harkins, "is all it took. He got the message in language he understands."⁴⁶

Other women took direct action, sometimes resorting to aggressive steps to stop harassment. Roseanne, a friend of Janet Johnson who was responsible for taking her to Consol's regional personnel office to obtain an application for employment, worked at Consol's Osage No. 3 mine near Morgantown, West Virginia. According to Johnson, the women who worked at Osage No. 3 "got a lot of hassles." Roseanne and a male co-worker had a tumultuous working relationship; they were either fighting or he was trying to "butter her up." One day, however, as she bent over to go through a stopping, he "flipped her on the butt." Roseanne never said a word. Instead, she picked up a cement block and waited for him to come through the stopping. When he did, she hit him with the block. His injury was not serious, but Roseanne was reprimanded for the incident. One boss, who witnessed the event, told Johnson that the miner had it coming, and the other bosses

⁴⁶Interview with Jean Harkins, Carmichaels, Pennsylvania, 24 July 1998.

secretly laughed at his plight.⁴⁷

Opal Reynolds remembered only two incidents of sexual harassment that occurred during her tenure in the coal industry. In one instance women miners banded together to send a clear message to their harasser. One man had a reputation for “running his dirty mouth” in front of all of the women, but repeated warnings failed to stop him. One day at the end of their shift, he started again on the bus. Having finally heard enough, the women threw him out of the bus while it was still running. When questioned about the incident, however, their boss stated that he fell out of the bus. The second incident occurred on Opal’s second day as a red hat while she sat at the face observing the crew mine coal. As she watched, a man sat down beside her and kept putting his hands on her. Unwilling to suffer in silence, she subsequently “slapped the tar out of him.” Meanwhile, her boss overheard the commotion and offered her his hammer, but Opal told him that she did not need any tools to take care of her harasser. In any event, after this incident, the miner never bothered her again.⁴⁸

Some women like Opal were fortunate to have the support and protection of their supervisors, but for many of the women, their biggest problem underground was handling sexual harassment from their bosses. This topic will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

For a few women, the harassment escalated and went from graffiti written on stoppings, dirty jokes, and lewd comments to threats of rape or physical attacks. During a trial held in Wheeling, West Virginia, in September 1982 to determine whether or not Consolidation Coal Company was responsible for the actions of foremen who allegedly drilled a peephole into the wall of the women’s bathhouse, the

⁴⁷ Interview with Janet Johnson, Mount Morris, Pennsylvania, 10 July 1998.

⁴⁸ Norris and Cypres’, Women of Coal, p. 102.

plaintiffs testified to incidents of sexual harassment. Darla Baker, the leader of the plaintiffs in the case, was warned at her interview prior to her employment at Consol's Benwood mine "not to be surprised if I was grabbed in the breasts or derriere." Despite the warning, Baker began working at the mine in September 1977. She was attacked in late 1977 by a union employee who grabbed her breasts, kissed her neck, and threatened to rape her. They struggled on the ground until she escaped and was able to run for help. When she ran to her foreman and crew for help, however, Baker stated that "the boss and crew laughed. . . . no one helped." She also testified about an incident that occurred during the summer of 1980 when another male co-worker backed her against a wall and asked if she wanted to work a Saturday for overtime pay. He suggested that she meet him in a local hotel to earn her overtime pay. Incidents such as these were deliberately downplayed by defense attorneys however. On the third day of the trial, Robert Steptoe, counsel for the defense, questioned the women about the mine's grievance procedures and the general mood of the joking that occurs between miners during their shifts. He referred to this degrading form of joking as "the coal miners' way."⁴⁹

The sexualization of the workplace was carried over into the division of labor between men and women. Unsolicited male behavior, whether in the form of sexual harassment or help on the job, demonstrated most men's perception of women as sexual objects rather than real workers. Sexual intimidation was initially used to try to force women to quit, but for those who stayed, it became a tool contrived to control them and keep them in lower paid positions.

Most of the women who accepted jobs in the mine did so for one reason,

⁴⁹ Beltz, Margaret, "Female Coal Miners Testify Male Miners Voiced Threats of Rape," Box 85, fol. 8, Sept. 1982 Clippings, Wheeling Peephole, Series IX, CEP Records, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee .

money. Financial security motivated the women to persevere regardless of the toll the work took on their bodies or emotional well-being. They knew that they would have to tolerate ridicule or teasing, but for some women the attitudes of men who thought that they were unable to do anything because they were “girls” was harder to handle than the profanity. The notion of the “natural superiority” of men in work relations is indicated in the following statement from one miner:

They can't stand the thought of a woman being smarter than them, that's just typical man. So you have to let them know that you think they're still the best. That's the only way to get along in the mines. I do that by letting them know I was in there to try. . . . like if I was doing something I'd try to let them make the decisions. I'd always let the man be the boss and I'd be the helper. That's the best way to get along with them they won't like you if you don't treat them that way.⁵⁰

Many women felt compelled to prove themselves when they first entered the mines. Sandra Bailey, who started working in the mines in 1975 when she went to work at Beth-Elkhorn No. 29 mine near Jenkins, Kentucky, stated that she had no trouble shoveling spillage off the belt line. She said that she took one side and a man took the other, and she often she teased him, saying that he was trying to make her look bad. She did not deny that he was physically stronger than she was, but she shoveled twice as fast to compensate for her lack of strength, thus proving her ability to do the work.⁵¹ The women found it difficult, however, to show co-workers and supervisors what they were capable of doing with only a shovel, and for most women, the only tool that they were permitted to use for a long time was a shovel. All new miners, or red hats, must work under the supervision of an experienced miner, a black hat, for the first ninety days. Afterwards, they become general inside laborers (GI's).

⁵⁰ Hammond and Mahoney, “Reward- Cost Balancing,” p. 23.

⁵¹ Swardson, “Women Dig,” p. 84.

Both men and women usually graduate to shoveling the belt line, rock dusting, hanging curtain, setting timbers, laying track, building brattices, and checking engines. However, unlike the men, most women miners stayed on the belt line for months and even years before they were trained to run equipment. One woman who shoveled the belt line for several months after her training period expired correctly equated jobs that she did as a GI with “clean up duty. . . . keeping it nice, [like] housekeeping.”⁵²

Since miners believed that “getting coal” was the heart of coal mining, most women had a hard time becoming miners since women were kept away from the face where the coal was mined. In the Mahoney study only two of the fifteen women interviewed worked at the face operating equipment or as crew members, and all but four of these women had worked in the mines for at least a year at the time of the study.⁵³ Thus, women shoveled the belt line and usually worked alone. Debra Monsor was assigned to sweeping out company pick-up trucks for three months at the strip mine where she worked. She was formally reprimanded for swearing, because according to Monsor, the company wanted “non swearing girls with brooms,” not coal miners.⁵⁴ Many women traded in their kitchen brooms for shovels and continued to work alone on the beltline doing housework similar to what they had done as housewives and mothers.

For some women miners success meant working “like a man.” Equally important, they pushed themselves to “keep up with the men.” Many women were surprised, however, to find that when they worked very hard, the men either slowed down or stopped working. Furthermore, men often warned them to slow down so that

⁵² Mahoney, “Appalachian Women’s Perceptions,” p. 28.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 85-86.

⁵⁴ “The Militant Women Mining the Coal Fields,” Business Week, 25 June, 1979, p. 31.

they (the men) would not look bad.⁵⁵ Cathy Willis quickly learned this lesson at Consol's Humphrey No. 7 mine. If she failed to work at the men's pace, they sat down and did nothing.⁵⁶ The men did not expect them to be able to do the work. However, when the women proved their ability to do the work, the men certainly did not want to see them complete their assigned tasks more quickly than they themselves had done.⁵⁷

Male miners find ways to lessen the strenuous demands of mining. For example, when bosses are absent, production and maintenance typically slows down. If an assigned job is completed, miners are known to take quick naps in the dinner hole. This especially occurs on the midnight shift for with the lights on their hardhats turned off the beams of light from the hardhat of an approaching supervisor give miners ample warning to resume working. Women had to adapt to this relaxed work pace if they were to gain the acceptance of their co-workers. With this object in mind, one woman noted that the only complaint she heard from the men was that once women were hired, they worked too hard to prove themselves. As a result, once company officials saw them working this hard, the foremen tried to get everyone going at that pace.⁵⁸ Thus, faced with the dilemma of working very hard and becoming known as "suck ups" or performing at a slower pace so as to not make the men look bad, many women took the path of least resistance and conformed to work norms established by their male peers.⁵⁹

In the beginning, the men also watched as women tried to perform tasks that

⁵⁵ Hammond and Mahoney, "Reward-Cost Balancing," p. 21.

⁵⁶ Interview with Cathy Willis, Morgantown, West Virginia, 15 July 1998.

⁵⁷ Ibid., and Ben Bedell, "Women Take Their Place in the Mines," *The Guardian*, 29 November 1978, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Ben Bedell, "Women Take Their Place in the Mines," *The Guardian*, 29 November 1978.

⁵⁹ Hammond and Mahoney, "Reward-Cost-Balancing," p. 21.

even they themselves could not do without assistance. Although they had been trained to perform their jobs in ways that minimized injury, the men would watch the women perform their jobs in ways that could and did cause injuries. Cathy Willis believed that they did this hoping that the women would become discouraged and quit.⁶⁰

Women who could not handle the work did not stay very long, but those who remained worked hard to prove to themselves and to the men that they could do the work. Jean Harkins observed that once the men saw her working, they accepted her. Furthermore, they used to “growl at her” when she did work that she did not have to do without assistance.⁶¹ Most of the men did lend a hand to women struggling to perform their jobs alone, but assistance was given for a myriad of reasons and produced both positive and negative consequences. Some men believed that women were unwilling to work, deeming them the weaker sex and incapable of doing the work. Thus, to get the job done they helped. Other men, having been socialized to help women, chivalrously lent their assistance. At the same time some women accepted the aid of their male co-workers to feed the male ego, believing that the best way to get along with the men was to let them think that they were “still the best.”⁶² Other women believed that men offered their help out of a sincere desire not to see them get hurt. Nevertheless, some men and women learned to work as a team, offering mutual aid as needed. Women who pulled their own weight risked reducing opportunities to prove themselves if they accepted help too often, but on the other hand, women who did not pull their own weight earned reputations as sluggards.⁶³

⁶⁰ Interview with Cathy Willis, Morgantown, West Virginia, 10 July 1998.

⁶¹ Interview with Jean Harkins, Carmichaels, Pennsylvania, 24 July 1998.

⁶² Hammond and Mahoney, *supra* n.117.

⁶³ Yount, “Women and Men Coal Miners,” pp. 424-26.

Gradually the women won the acceptance of the men. Rosa Pitts, an African American woman who was hired by Bethlehem Steel for its No. 58 mine at Mariana, Pennsylvania, under an affirmative action plan in 1977, remembered her first few weeks in the mines, and like her Central Appalachian sisters, recognized their importance to the industry:

I'll never forget our first day. The men all lined up on one side of the portal and we could hear them saying under their breaths, "It's bad luck, women in the mines." Then one day a few weeks later a shuttle car operator didn't show up for work and the only one who could do the job was a woman. They put her on the shuttle car. We're getting to be indispensable.⁶⁴

Still, many men still did not believe that the mines were a good place for women to work, but since the women were there they did not want them to be taken advantage of by the coal companies. In an interview with a reporter from the Daily World in 1977, a woman miner from Fairmont, West Virginia, believed that 95 percent of the men were supportive. She stated that several of the older men encouraged her to learn as many skills in the mine as possible, telling her to bid on every training job that became available. He believed that acquiring additional skills was a "question of mutual safety" and a component of working in a democratic, unionized workplace.⁶⁵ With more than eight hundred women working in mines across the United States by 1977 (more than four hundred were UMWA members), it was essential for the men to support the rights of the women working alongside them. Five large steel companies employed 44 percent of all UMWA women miners, the result of anti-discrimination suits filed in 1974, and a high proportion of the remainder worked for other major coal producers.⁶⁶ The

⁶⁴ Tim Wheeler, "Women in the Mines," Daily World, 29 December 1977, p. 8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Swardson, "Women Dig," p. 85.

union realized that companies did not want these women, but they also recognized that the women could be used as part of a divide and conquer strategy to segment the work force and weaken the union. Consequently, many, but not all, locals encouraged women to become active in the union. After working for only a year in the mine, Linda Triplett was nominated to run for vice president of her local near Buckhannon, West Virginia, where she worked for Bethlehem Steel. She ran against a man and won. When the local president took a foreman's job a month later, she became the first woman local president in the United Mine Workers of America. The union also began to include women on the national level, for as the number of women in the union grew so too did their participation in the national convention. Their growing presence manifested itself in a maternity-leave provision that was included in the contract report of the collective-bargaining council to the 1977 convention.⁶⁷

Most men accepted the women conditionally and recognized their female co-workers' need to fulfill the role of the breadwinner. The majority, however, still did not believe that women should be in the mines, but they respected and accepted them as individuals who, like themselves, had families who depended upon them to make it safely home with the paycheck. They also realized the need to protect each other in a dangerous environment, for in the coal industry, especially in this age of computerized technology, brains are as important as brawn.⁶⁸

The mining industry experienced a period of expansion during the seventies, providing women with the best opportunity to join the industry and opportunities to acquire high-seniority positions faster than ever.⁶⁹ Still, for most women their greatest obstacle to safety and advancement was not their male co-worker but rather their boss.

⁶⁷ Bedell, "Women Take Their Place," p. 5.

⁶⁸ Mahoney, "Appalachian Women's Perceptions," pp. 61-62.

⁶⁹ Swardson, "Women Dig," p. 85.

CHAPTER 4

PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT: THE PROBLEM WITH MALE SUPERVISORS

Getting a job in the mines was only the first step in “stripping away century old barriers.”¹ Women knew that their male co-workers did not want them in the mines, but few women realized how deeply embedded were men’s feelings of anger and resentment. Generations of miners had developed language, rituals, and behaviors as unique strategies for coping with an environment that was understood only by those who worked in its trenches, and after working for over a century in this environment, miners had created a masculine culture that proved to be inhospitable and even impenetrable to women.² In addition, totally unprepared for their arrival, coal companies feared the ramifications that might follow employing these women. Like most members of coal mining communities, company officials believed that a woman’s place was in the home, not the mine, especially an underground operation where a woman miner was considered a “liability.” One foreman echoed the opinion held by many managers in his letter to the editor of the Charleston Gazette in April 1979.

“A woman is only a liability to any coal company. Yes, dear, the work is physically demanding. The reason you haven’t found it so demanding is that some male miner has carried your weight . . . stay home and take care of the most beautiful, God-given thing in the world--motherhood and home. We’ll mine the coal. You just have the supper ready.”³

Government intervention removed the hiring barrier for these women, but many companies still resisted. Companies hired women to avoid prosecution, and they

¹ Bedell, “Women Take Their Place, p. 5.

² Dona G. Gearhart, “ ‘Surely a Wench Can Choose Her Own Work’ : Women Coal Miners in Paonia, Colorado, 1976-1987,” Ph.D. diss., University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1996, p. 137.

³ Letter to the Editor in the Charleston Gazette, from J. Roy Lucas, 2 April 1979, quoted in the CEP News!, April/May 1979, p. 3.

resented the government's interference in their business. Linda Triplet began working at Bethlehem Steel's mine near Buckhannon, West Virginia, when the company began to hire its first female employees in 1973. Triplett, who was the first woman hired at her mine, realized this immediately.

The first day I walked into the mine, the foreman told the men to make it as tough as possible on me, hoping I'd quit. The foreman assigned me to shoveling the beltline which is one of the hardest jobs there. . . . But after I did that job and about four others that's just as hard, the men started respecting me because they saw I could do any job they could.⁴

Triplett believed that she could handle the physical aspects of the work. However, obtaining a job underground was the first of many hurdles that Triplet and her female co-workers faced. Many supervisors grudgingly accepted women in the mines, realizing that they had no choice but to accept their presence, especially in light of litigation filed against their employers. Some supervisors employed various means designed to force the women to quit, including spreading rumors throughout the community that were designed to pit the men and their wives against the women.⁵ Some companies barely provided provisions guaranteed by union contracts such as bathhouses whereas others required women to clean their bathhouses on their own time. Rumors rarely convinced women to quit, but repeated instances of discrimination and sexual harassment did.

Although they did not believe that the mine was a good place for women, some bosses respected their need to work and support their families and accepted them once they proved that they could do the work. A few company officials such as Howard Frey, executive vice president of Westmoreland Coal Company, even

⁴ Bedell, "Women Take Their Place," p. 5.

⁵ Ibid.

asserted that women were a “welcome source of labor.” Others maintained that they were very pleased with their new employees since they experienced less turnover, lower absenteeism, and improved production in mines that employed women. Equally important, women believed that they had to prove themselves, and in doing so, they proved to be very conscientious workers. Ira McKeever, president of Colowyo Coal Company stated that women were better operators than men because they maintained their equipment regularly, were very conscious of their position, and less “showoffish.”⁶ In some instances supervisors were also openly supportive and helpful to their female employees. Janet Johnson’s first superintendent at Humphrey No. 7 was “really great.” He told his women miners to come to him whenever they experienced work-related problems, and Janet believed that the superintendent’s sincerity was evident since he never failed to ask her how she was doing. Most of the bosses at Humphrey treated the women fairly “for the most part.” Generally, however, Johnson thought that older women’s maturity and flexibility helped them to get along well with the bosses.⁷ Mahoney substantiated this inducement in her study. One interviewee told Mahoney that older women possessed better communication skills that enabled them to follow directives and get along with the bosses better than younger women.⁸ However, the 1981 CEP survey and articles and studies found during my research on women miners generally indicate a true lack of management support. Management concerned itself more with avoiding lawsuits than creating a safe, hassle-free workplace for its female employees.

Bosses frequently withheld their verdict on the suitability of employing women

⁶ Presidential Commission on Coal, The American Coal Miner: A Report on Communities and Living Conditions in the Coal Fields, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1980), p. 198.

⁷ Interview with Janet Johnson, Mount Morris, Pennsylvania, 10 July 1998.

⁸ Mahoney, “Appalachian Women’s Perceptions,” p. 37.

underground. Instead, they waited to see if women could do the work. Considering the various lawsuits filed against U.S. Steel for discrimination, it is not surprising that Jean Harkins, who was one of the first women hired at the Kirby, Pennsylvania operation, observed that the company “didn’t stand in your way.” Some bosses took this quite literally. For example, one assistant foreman watched Harkins carry eighty pound bags of rock bond without any help. Later, he told her that he was watching her carry those bags since he did not think that she would even attempt to carry them. However, Harkins knew that she had to prove herself, and little did he know that she could not have carried them if they had been lying on the ground.⁹

Even when women proved that they could do the work, however, bosses frequently withheld their approval. Linda Tichnell’s shift foreman at Humphrey No.7, Charlie Harper, never gave her any problems, but at the same time he never offered her any encouragement. After Tichnell was laid off from Humphrey, he told company officials at Emerald Resources’ Kirby mine to hire her, saying “If you’re going to hire a woman at Kirby, hire Linda.” Unable to bring himself to compliment a woman miner, he never told her that she did a good job even though a male co-worker, who worked alongside her under Harper, told her that he would rather lay blocks with her than with anyone else in the mine.¹⁰

Harper conveyed his disapproval without words. When Janet Johnson was a red hat, he took five red hats, three men, Johnson, and another woman, to work in his section where he placed three men on one side of the belt and the two women on the other side. When the men were finished, he and the men left the work area, leaving the women unsupervised. The other woman chastised him for leaving them

⁹ Interview with Jean Harkins, Carmichaels, Pennsylvania, 24 July 1998.

¹⁰ Interview with Linda Tichnell, Garards Fort, Pennsylvania, 22 July 1998.

alone, but to no avail. Without a word being spoken, this incident relayed his negative opinion of women miners to the women in his crew.¹¹

Subsequent superintendents at Humphrey No. 7 gave the women a hard time, because they clearly saw the women as a liability and an inconvenience. Their disinterest was clearly illustrated on one occasion when Johnson and another woman went to another superintendent to file a complaint. Once inside his office, instead of addressing the women directly, he looked right past them and talked to the union representative who accompanied them as if “they weren’t even there.”¹²

Once the women were hired, however, they could not be wished away, and since there were so few of them, they were highly visible. The women at one mine nicknamed a boss “Woman hater” because he did not believe that the mine was a proper place for women, and as a result, he preferred not to have them in his section. The other men knew about his nickname and embarrassed him by teasing him about it.¹³ This surely exacerbated the situation between the boss and his female crew members, especially if the teasing was accompanied by a decrease in respect and cooperation. Both supervisors and rank and file miners perceived women miners as threats, but managers were the most vulnerable to shifts within the power structure of a mine.¹⁴

When women obtained the upper hand with a boss, such as the situation between “The Woman hater” and his crew, most bosses naturally responded with measures designed to preserve their own positions within the company, because they could not afford to admit that a woman miner was in control. As a result, women

¹¹ Interview with Janet Johnson, Mount Morris, Pennsylvania, 10 July 1998.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mahoney, “Appalachian Women’s Perceptions,” p. 66.

¹⁴ Ibid.

miners were constantly kept busy, frequently working without breaks, a strategy bosses employed to counter accusations of favoritism.¹⁵ Jean Harkins' first boss clearly felt threatened by his first female red hats, and he was very hard on her and another woman at No. 93 when they first started, constantly telling them that management had placed women on his crew because the company was trying to make it hard on him since it was almost time for his retirement. Another boss asked Harkins, "Why don't you women go and get jobs as waitresses or something?" She replied, saying "I've been there and done that and there was no money in that." Like many male supervisors, he really liked to "Lord it" over" her and the other women.¹⁶

Gender determined management expectations of co-workers. Sometimes this was advantageous for women miners, but more often than not it was detrimental and working hard did not help. In Those That Mattered, PJ advised women to keep quiet and "steer clear" of bosses, especially since she claimed that most bosses were only interested in sex. Even if a woman seized every opportunity to learn the skills necessary to do her job well, woman miner was still "damned if you do, damned if you don't." Good women were accused of taking a good man's job, and yet at the same time a poor performer was accused of being just "another lazy woman." Like PJ, most women were given the worst jobs, isolated, denied training opportunities and at best treated with indifference. In the worst situations, they were treated with contempt.¹⁷

Gender influenced supervisors' decisions even in non-work related situations. Perceptions of male and female roles, and the accompanying behavioral expectations, differed sharply and greatly influenced how the women were treated. Harkins filed a grievance against her boss when he refused to excuse her to attend her ex-husband's

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁶ Interview with Jean Harkins, Carmichaels, Pennsylvania, 24 July 1998.

¹⁷ Angle, Those That Mattered, pp. 209-10.

funeral when earlier that summer some of the men had been excused to attend the company picnic at an amusement park. He “got uppity” and informed Harkins that since she and the deceased were no longer married, she was not entitled to receive an excused absence. He further exacerbated the situation when he attempted to justify his decision by saying: “If we start letting people have off for everything around here, next thing you know people will be calling here that their cat’s on the roof.” Incensed that he exhibited such a lack of respect for her family when he compared the death of her children’s father to a cat stranded on a rooftop, she filed a grievance against him and won. Although less serious, another incident with a foreman also demonstrates the effect of gender-based stereotypes on personnel relations. When Harkins asked to take her personal days during doe season, a foreman told her that she should not take them during the hunting season since they should be “saved for the men.” Like the men, she was planning on taking her personal days to hunt.¹⁸

Some women were fortunate in their relations with management, proved their ability to do the work, and garnered respect when they confronted bosses and co-workers during gender-based conflicts. One woman’s foreman backed down after their confrontation:

Right after I went in, I had heard this same thing over and over, a woman’s place isn’t in the mines, she doesn’t need to be in the mines, she needs to be at home. I heard it so much I got tired of hearing it, and I knew my purpose in there and one day I told him, the foreman. . . . I told him, I said, ‘I’m here the same reason you’re here. I’ve got to support myself and my son the same as you’ve got to support your family.’ I just had to say it, I had just got tired of hearing it. . . . I think I got my point across to him and I haven’t had one say it to me since.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Interview with Jean Harkins, Carmichaels, Pennsylvania, 24 July 1998.

¹⁹ Mahoney, “Appalachian Women’s Perceptions,” p. 65.

Unfortunately, even if supervisors refrained from reminding women miners that their proper place was in the kitchen, their perceptions of socially accepted work roles had far reaching effects. Yount found that the behavior of supervisors was the central, determining factor behind the success of women employed in a traditionally male-dominated workplace, because their authority permitted them to exert great influence over the workplace, the women's reputation among co-workers, their self-concept as workers, and self-esteem. As a result, management's negative attitude toward their women miners influenced every facet of the work environment and reached into the women's pay envelopes since foremen determined training and job assignments, even in union operations. Managers were supposed to use their expertise to assess workers according to their ability, not preconceived notions of expected behavior based upon sex. Yet in the close quarters of a coal mine, everyone was privy to displays of negative feedback from bosses, and men willingly shared the boss's displeasure with a woman miner since disagreeing with him could jeopardize their employment. This was especially true when a group of miners were loyal to a boss. As one male miner said:

Life with our crew, is like the Bible. If he says do something, I don't give a damn what it is, I'll do it because I trust him with my life, and everybody on our crew is the same way. We never argue with him.²⁰

It is no surprise, therefore, that most of the problems women encountered emanated from their bosses. Foremen who turned crews against women left them with no support or any way to handle co-worker hostility. Furthermore, bosses who engaged in hostilities against women, refrained from objecting to it, or gave unspoken approval empowered harassers and caused the harassment to increase without fear of company reprisal. In addition, equipment that was run by women was sabotaged,

²⁰ Yount, "Women and Men Coal Miners," pp. 394-95, 444-47.

and foremen even recruited men to stalk, ambush, create or watch for opportunities to dismiss women.²¹

This guy I worked with, the superintendent had told him, you watch everything she does. I don't care what it is. If she does anything--if she takes too long of a break, if she keeps stopping or anything, you tell me and we'll have her fired. Finally I got it out of him because we were good friends and he said he couldn't do that to me. He told me a lot of things that they had said. So, I really had people watching me. If I wasn't shoveling constantly, if I took a break or something, it was reported to them. I couldn't believe it.²²

As a result, many women suffered in silence since they had no hope that a grievance would be successful, more less a formal suit against their harassers. Fearing retaliation, even men sympathetic to the plight of women miners rarely came to their aid. However, women slowly began to fight back, and if anything made an impression on coal companies, it was tampering with their profit margins. Expensive litigation decreased their "bottom line." As a result, several major coal companies initiated programs and policies designed to curb sexual harassment in their mines.

The Coal Employment Project and individual women miners began taking coal companies to court. As a result, companies began looking for ways to revamp personnel management programs in an attempt to ward off possible lawsuits and improve employer-employee relations. Several major coal companies realized that if they were to effectively improve the working environment, they had to go back and redesign programs for training both supervisors and hourly employees. Armco Coal Company thereupon initiated an "aggressive" in-house training program to train their production foremen in 1979, spending approximately \$12,000 per foremen trainee to

²¹ Ibid., pp. 450-51.

²² Ibid., p. 455.

develop them into “well-rounded, effective supervisors.” The Allen Management Action Program (AMAP), a twenty-week course consisting of eight hundred hours of paid instruction and on-site training, was designed to help foremen develop the skills necessary to organize and handle groups of men. The premise behind Armco’s management philosophy rested upon the belief that the section foreman was the vital link between its hourly and salaried work force, in essence, he represented management to the union man. To this end, foremen also attended classes on communication and technical instruction. In addition, the company added a course to the curriculum entitled “Working with People” that was designed in cooperation with the National Photographic Laboratories. This forty hour course portrayed foremen in various problems encountered underground and provided them with a variety of alternative solutions. The AMAP program clearly indicates that Armco had no interest in employing women miners since company officials evidently believed that real miners were men, not women, evidenced by comments made by John Knobb, head of Management and Training. Kolb observed that the men liked the program because they could “identify with the men in the film, because they looked and acted like real coal miners.²³

Unlike Armco, the Amax Coal Company provided its foremen with a training program that included workshops specifically intended to educate foremen on the special problems encountered by women in the mines. Amax perceived this as a critical problem after information obtained from company surveys warned officials of potential problems between female workers and male supervisors. Information gathered from these surveys indicated that ninety percent of their foremen did not have working wives and believed that the coal industry was no place for women. With this

²³ Allanna M. Sullivan, “Armco’s Foremen Trainees Instructed for 800 Hours,” Coal Age 84 (October 1979): 94-98.

in mind personnel managers designed the program to help these men understand why women wanted coal mining jobs or at least convince the foremen that the company was committed to hiring women. Armco required its nearly four hundred supervisors to attend thirteen workshops at six locations over a three month period in 1979.²⁴

The company designed the program “Challenge for Change” with the cooperation of the the Fort Wayne Women’s Bureau of Indiana, an organization dedicated to the promotion and awareness of issues that affected women. Women from the bureau taught the four-hour program to groups of fifteen to thirty-five men. The program emphasized communication skills, but the discussion groups centered on the role of women in the mines where the teachers underscored the fact behind a woman’s decision to go into the mines, money. In these discussion groups foremen expressed feelings that ranged from hostility to sympathy when told that financial security was the primary reason behind a woman’s decision to go into the mines. Consequently, the teachers had foremen participate in role playing activities with groups assigned to assume positions both for and against women in the mines. This forced many men to defend something they did not believe, a critical exercise since foremen frequently had to enforce management decisions that they personally did not support in order to increase efficiency and production. In addition, the sensitivity training program was designed to be used whenever future problems arose in the mine.²⁵

Amax revised its management training program in 1984. Called the Job Knowledge Survey (JKS), this program was designed to improve job knowledge and give supervisors the knowledge and skills necessary when faced with both equipment

²⁴ Allanna M. Sullivan, “Women Train for Coal Mining Jobs,” Coal Age 84 (October 1979):172-73.

²⁵ Ibid.

and personnel problems. This time the special problems posed by an integrated work force was addressed. Nicholas P. Chironis presented examples of typical labor-relations problems and solutions covered by JKS in an article published in Coal Age in 1984. The following is an example that deals with a supervisor and an alleged incident of sexual harassment:²⁶

Problem:

Betty Taylor (not her real name) has been with the company and working in your afternoon shift for 10 months as a haulage truck operator. About three weeks ago you spoke with her about poor work performance and lateness. During that discussion, which you held in your pick-up truck, she started to cry. So you patted her on the shoulder and handed her your handkerchief. The conversation ended with her promising to try to do better and thanking you for being so kind and considerate.

Today your supervisor and general mine manager call you in the office and the general mine manager says, "What's going on here? Betty Taylor has filed an EEOC suit against the company charging you with sexual harassment. She claims you made advances toward her twice, once in your pick-up during the shift and again at a local tavern." You are stunned. Once after work you did buy her a drink at the tavern.

Question:

As Betty Taylor's supervisor how would you handle this situation? Assume you are the mine's personnel officer, describe the action you would advise these two managers to take in this situation.

Answer:

1. Continue to treat Betty Taylor like any other employee. No special privileges or constraints.
2. Do not discuss case with her or anyone except appropriate company officers.

²⁶ Nicholas P. Chironis, "Training Program for Supervisors Pinpoints Management Problems, Teaches Specific Solutions," Coal Age 89 (June 1984): 61-64.

3. Supervisor should fully document what happened in both incidents in chronological order. He should quote from his performance discussion notes he should have made in his supervisor's contact book. He should name any supervisors who may have also been in the area and witnessed him in either incident.
4. Personnel officer should meet with all supervisors and review company policy on equal and fair treatment of employees. In the meeting he should generally discuss the case but caution supervisors not to discuss it with anyone. He should tell them that if anyone asks about the case they should answer, "I am aware of it but am not at liberty to discuss it." He would also insure that bulletin boards and company policy on employee fair treatment are up to date.²⁷

JKS advised supervisors to be "cautious and alert for compromising situations." In addition, they warned them against making off-color comments or telling suggestive stories. The program was used to train supervisory personnel employed by all Amax mines, Arch Mineral Corporation, Consolidation Coal Company surface operations, and other underground mines.²⁸ The growing number of sexual harassment suits against coal companies during the early eighties clearly sounded a strong warning to management: educate your managers against improper behavior toward women employees or be prepared to pay. Unfortunately, some companies, including Consolidation Coal Company, implemented policies against discrimination and harassment but failed more often than not to enforce them even after women filed grievances or lawsuits against co-workers or supervisors.

Coal companies reluctantly hired women during the 1970s, but they balked even more at training and promoting them during the eighties. Galen Martin, executive director of the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights called it the "second

²⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

²⁸ Ibid.

generation” problem for women. Martin stated that getting women hired was much easier than getting them equal opportunity for promotion since initial hire discrimination was “more clear cut” than denied opportunities for training and advancement because it was difficult to document the number of times women were given opportunities to train on equipment. Equally important, It was even harder to determine if men were given more opportunities than women.²⁹

Stories abound concerning women who were denied training and job advancement despite seniority and their ability to perform the work. The Amax Coal Company spent a sizable sum of money developing training programs for its supervisors to ward off sexual harassment and other personnel problems, but they ignored job discrimination. Pam Schuble, who in 1986 worked at Amax’s Ayrshire mine near Chandler, Indiana, shared her plans to file a civil court suit against Amax. She alleged that she was qualified to run a drill and bid on a drill operator job several times, but Amax denied her promotion to the job. She had been a coal miner for twelve years and a drill helper for the past six years, nevertheless, she watched while men with less seniority were trained to operate the drill. Although the drill operator was paid the same as the drill helper, she wanted the job because it represented prestige and acceptance. Schuble maintained that the company claimed that women did not know how to run equipment, rendering it pointless to promote them.³⁰ Once hired, women often remained delegated to the ranks of general labor for several years and had to fight the company to be trained. Management ignored seniority and passed over women to train men. As one woman miner from West Virginia declared: “We build walls, hang curtains, and throw rock dust. You can have

²⁹ “Women Miners Dig Away at Discrimination,” Coal Age 91 (August 1986):11.

³⁰ Ibid.

seniority and bid for a job, but the foreman won't train you."³¹

Some women experienced little difficulty obtaining training, however. As previously discussed, mine managers held the key to training and advancement opportunities in the mine. As one of the first women employed at her mine, Jean Harkins had no problem getting trained after ninety days at Consol's No. 93 mine, and this remained true when she went to work at U.S. Steel's new mine after No. 93 closed down. Harkins was one of the first two women to go inside at Kirby, and as part of the second crew to go into the mine and an experienced shuttle car operator and roof bolter, Harkins easily obtained training to operate other equipment at Kirby.³² The women employed at Humphrey No. 7 mine also received training with little difficulty, but supervisors usually refused to train women to operate heavy equipment which was designated men's territory and off limits to women. On the other hand, Shirley Casteel had to wait her turn to receive training, but she was trained on every piece of equipment that she requested. She trained as a roof bolter and worked as a bolter on several occasions, but she refrained from bidding for a permanent bolter position because of the dangerous nature of the job. She also disliked working on the long wall, the computerized mining system used at Humphrey to cut and load coal because Casteel considered working near the long wall dangerous, noisy, and nerve-wracking. Instead, she ran buggy and even worked shoveling the belt line, a classification that she actually bid on. Her case was exceptional, however, because she had the opportunities and made her own decisions. She worked as a general laborer for several years until she was laid off in 1997.³³

Janet Johnson was the first woman on her shift, and she laid blocks as a

³¹ Linda Michaels, "Women Coal Miners Can Dig It, Too," *Daily World*, 14 June 1979, p. 2.

³² Interview with Jean Harkins, Carmichaels, Pennsylvania, 24 July 1998.

³³ Interview with Shirley Casteel, Morgantown, West Virginia, 14 August 1998.

general laborer for a “long time” before she was trained to run equipment, but Johnson did not press to be trained. Instead, she waited. In contrast this, the women who started a few months later at Humphrey “threw fits” when they did not receive training to run equipment as soon as their probationary period expired, refusing to wait patiently as women have been socialized to do for centuries. Thus, to avoid a confrontation, their shift boss commenced to train the women on his crew to run the buggy. Yet by the time it was Janet’s turn to be trained, her desire to learn had evaporated. Johnson later ran the supply motor, ferrying rock dust and other supplies to various sections of the mine and operated a larger motor that was used to haul coal cars to and from the face. However, as she grew older, she preferred dead work (non-mining, maintenance work) to running equipment.³⁴

Like most women, Linda Tichnell spent several years as a general inside laborer before she successfully bid on another job. Since she preferred not to force the company to accept her bids for other jobs, she remained a GI for seven years. Eventually she cut cars, operated a loading machine, and ran a buggy. She also operated the boom at the tipple until she elected to take a position underground as a GI, a job she held until she was laid off from Humphrey in 1996.³⁵ As two of the first women hired as miners at Humphrey, Johnson and Tichnell hesitated to force management to give them training as required by law. As they accumulated seniority and work experience, however, the two women filed various types of grievances against their employer, but the confidence to do so grew slowly.

Cathy Willis started working at Humphrey No. 7 a few months later than Johnson. She found training hard to get, especially training on larger machines that were viewed as part of the male miner’s domain. She admitted that being

³⁴ Interview with Janet Johnson, Mount Morris, Pennsylvania, 10 July 1998.

³⁵ Interview with Linda Tichnell, Garards Fort, Pennsylvania, 22 July 1998.

“hard-headed” made it difficult for her to wait, so she pushed until she was trained on equipment she wanted to operate. Willis applied to receive training to run this motor during the eighties and filed a grievance when the company denied her request. Consol maintained that there were other workers who had more seniority waiting to be trained and refused to train Willis to run the fifty-ton motor for several years. She discovered that men had applied for training after her however. Evidently the company encouraged these men to apply in an attempt to keep her from running the fifty ton motor. To make matters worse, favoritism evidently played a part in receiving training at Humphrey for a woman with less seniority was trained before her. Willis finally received her training in 1994. Once she started running the motor, however, she discovered that the other woman was running the motor out of the Maidsville preparation plant, evidently the run favored by the motor men. After the other woman miner realized that Willis was aware of her job assignment, she acquiesced to Willis’ demand for the Maidsville run, because she knew that she would “push back.” Consol was as “hard-headed as she,” however, and Willis never won a grievance during her eighteen years of employment although she believed that she got along better with management than many of her fellow miners.³⁶

Opportunities for training boiled down to favoritism, seniority, and trust, and management trusted men to operate equipment, not women. Given a choice, supervisors usually offered training or a job to the men first. As one woman miner noted, “They had a bad habit of keeping the women on the job [shoveling the belt] but sending the men to the section to get started.”³⁷ Thus, women were forced to push the company into letting them learn to operate equipment. Even when a woman had more seniority than a man, however, she received fewer training opportunities. The

³⁶ Interview with Cathy Willis, Morgantown, West Virginia, 15 July 1998.

³⁷ Mahoney, “Appalachian Women’s Perceptions,” pp. 33-34.

Kentucky Commission on Human Rights convened in 1980 to receive public input regarding proposed guidelines against discrimination and sexual harassment in the coal industry. Rita Miller of White Plains, who had worked in two mines in Kentucky, described numerous instances of denied opportunities for training. One female co-worker had labored underground for more than two years as a rock duster before receiving additional training to run machinery. As Miller waited to be trained to run equipment, she watched new, male red hats go to the face on the second shift when she was kept on midnight shift. The management of another mine ignored the requests of women who wanted to go to the face after ninety days, and one boss refused to allow the women in his crew operate any equipment. Miller told the commission that of the ten women who worked in her mine, none were qualified to operate equipment.³⁸

As a result, possessing few training certificates, women were the first laid off and the last recalled when the industry entered a period of decline in the late eighties since laid off miners are hired for available positions at mines listed on their panel papers [papers filed with the union that list training certificates and mines that a laid off miner is interested in] according to job classification and seniority. Thus, as Betty Hall of the CEP observed, “The bottom line is, when women fill out the panel, all they can say is ‘shovel the belt.’ They call back the men as roof bolt helpers and have them [the men] shoveling the belt.”³⁹

Bosses blatantly discriminated against women for a number of reasons according to Yount, because most of them subscribed to the long held theory that women were incompetent to perform hard, physical labor and to operate machinery.

³⁸ Sexual Harassment Hearings , Kentucky Commission on Human Rights, 10 July 1980. Archive 355, Tape 193, CEP Records, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

³⁹ McMichaels, “Women Coal Miners Can Dig It, Too,” p. 2.

In addition, since the competence of their crew influenced their own job security, supervisors forced higher job expectations upon women to coerce them into quitting. A few bosses gave women a hard time to gain the acceptance and loyalty of their male crews, others used women as scapegoats to be used as convenient vents for their own frustrations, and lower ranking bosses discriminated against women to please their own supervisors. Regardless of their motivation, foremen consciously placed roadblocks in the way of training for many women miners as they often ignored seniority and grievances making it very difficult for women to be considered true miners by the men who worked in teams to “get coal.” In addition, as I have said, discrimination barred women from procuring training that increased opportunities for recall when they were laid off. Thus, when grievances failed, some women resorted to litigation to force companies to train them as required by law.⁴⁰

Title VII states that women workers must be given equal opportunity to obtain training and placement in job categories which provide opportunity for promotion. Yet coal companies continued to deny women training and jobs that offered them better wages and future job opportunities. Brenda Salyers filed a complaint with the West Virginia Human Rights Commission in 1981 alleging gender-based harassment, job discrimination, and discrimination in training opportunities against Bishop Coal Company. Salyers bid for a vacant job as a scoop operator, but Bishop denied her request claiming that a foreman had not vouched for her ability to run the scoop. When she protested and claimed that she possessed the necessary skills, management arranged a test. Salyers admitted that she failed to do well on the test, but filed a grievance against the company nevertheless. During arbitration both parties agreed to a second test, and again she performed unsatisfactorily. There was

⁴⁰ Yount, “Women and Men Coal Miners,” pp. 396-97.

substantial evidence during both tests that Salyers was tested on equipment that was not in perfect operating condition, and despite her performances, she was permitted to continue to operate the scoop.⁴¹

The commission awarded Salyer \$7,500 as compensatory damages for “mental anguish” in addition to attorney’s fees and related legal expenses. Although the company presented evidence that Salyer was not qualified to run the scoop and that male employees had been tested for jobs involving equipment operation, the commission ruled in Salyer’s favor. The commission’s decision was not based upon her competence as a scoop operator when she bid for the job, but rather on three conclusions: 1. operating a scoop is not a difficult job to learn; 2. a male employee with minimal training was assigned to operate a scoop without testing; 3. no man had ever been tested prior to being assigned to the job. Evidence presented by Salyers’ lawyers amply supported the commissioners’ decision. Three male miners testified that they learned how to operate a scoop in fifteen minutes, and one of the witnesses for the company acknowledged on rebuttal that it only required half a shift for him to learn how to run the scoop. The commission also found that the company had promoted a male miner with little training or experience to scoop operator without a test three to four months before Salyer’s bid. Bishop admitted that the miner in question was still being given on-the-job training at the time of the hearing.⁴²

Bishop Coal evidently perceived this case as setting a dangerous precedent since the company appealed the commission’s decision to the Supreme Court of Appeals on a technicality. The Supreme Court agreed that Salyer was the victim of gender-based discrimination, however, and affirmed the decision to award her \$400 in

⁴¹ Bishop Coal Company v. Brenda Salyers and The West Virginia Human Rights Commission, No. 18138, Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia, 1989, LEXIS-NEXIS, pp. 3-4.

⁴² Ibid.

back pay that she would have earned if her original bid had been accepted.⁴³

Whether or not women received the training for which they were entitled, supervisors often segregated them from the rest of the work force by sending them to isolated locations in the mine to work alone. Consequently, women suffered both psychologically and physically from the effects of segregation, because they were kept from enjoying the humor and mutual protection offered in a group setting, strategies used by male miners to cope with the harsh, underground environment. Monotony, complacency and boredom also placed the women at high risk for accidents, and isolated workers were less likely to receive help when injured.⁴⁴

Injury sometimes resulted from isolation. Pat Baldwin, who headed the Women Miners' Support Group near Madisonville, Kentucky, described to the state human rights commission the discrimination she faced after she began working in the mines in 1977 . Management promised to put her to work at the face after her probationary period. Instead, she remained on the belt line for a year. Finally, after district union officials applied some pressure, the company promoted her to the face. Unfortunately, they sent Baldwin to work alone, without any training, to shoot coal. Subsequently she was injured and was off work for six months. After she returned to work at the face, however, she overheard the mine foremen telling the face boss to "ride her." The foreman told him to keep the men from helping Baldwin, so she would leave. Her face boss, however, defended her right to work at the face. Nevertheless, she refused to take any action against the foreman, fearing that her face boss would suffer the consequences.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 1, 10.

⁴⁴ Yount, "Women and Men Coal Miners," p. 416.

⁴⁵ Sexual Harassment Hearings, 10 July 1980.

Helen Nevel labored at Pyro Coal Company's No. 11 mine without experiencing any harassment until she asked to be trained to run equipment, working for two years as a GI. Her company finally put her to work as a shooter, a worker who planted sticks of dynamite and set the charges needed to blast coal loose from the coal seam. At the same time she was training, a twenty-two year old "boy" was also being trained at the same job. An older man stayed with him for a while, but a younger miner showed Nevel how to shoot and then left. Nevel was thus forced to carry seventy pound bags of powder, bags of caps, cable, and battery by herself in a thirty-six inch high coal seam. Since she did not know when to shoot, the miner running the cutting machine was forced to wait until she figured it out. Shortly after she began working as a shooter, she began suffering from insomnia, headaches, and bouts of vomiting, symptoms associated with close exposure to powdered explosives. When she took a letter to her boss from her doctor requesting a job transfer, he replied, "If you can't shoot, take your lunch bucket and ass up the hill and go home." She returned to her job shooting coal. After the company made it plain to Nevel that they hoped that she would quit, she was afraid to miss work, because she feared that they would use her absences as grounds for dismissal. She returned to shooting and carrying her supplies without help the day after being hurt on the job. After her second trip to the emergency room with work-related injuries, a ruptured stomach from carrying heavy loads of supplies, the doctor asked, "What are they trying to do, kill you?" After her doctor reluctantly released her to return to work, Nevel again returned to work. Unfortunately, company officials asked for her resignation upon her return. When she refused, arguing that she had a legal medical excuse and needed her job to support her son, they threatened to dismiss her for absenteeism. Pyro followed through with their threat and fired her. In addition, they blocked Nevel's application for unemployment benefits, maintaining that she was an uncooperative employee. As a

result, Helen Nevel and her son were forced to survive on Social Security benefits and welfare while she awaited for the outcome of litigation she subsequently filed with the Federal Contract Compliance Office against the coal company. Her face boss, her major tormenter, finally quit working for Pyro, for when the men found out what he did to Nevel, they refused to mine coal for him.⁴⁶

Working alone did in fact result in death for some women. Jackie Herron did not like working alone, but on 4 June 1980, she was running the man-trip alone, pushing a rock duster. She had gone under an overcast when the trolley pole came loose, and when she reached up to reattach the pole the trolley rolled backward crushing her between the overcast and the man trip. Following her death, inspectors found defective brakes. Her employer, Peabody Coal Company, claimed that the brakes had been replaced before the accident. But after a visit to the Goodman Equipment Company, a local supplier, family members found out differently. New brakes had been ordered from Chicago but had not arrived, therefore Herron had ridden a man trip with defective brakes to her death. She worked alone on a job usually done by two miners. Men refuse to work alone. Herron was the first women miner killed underground.⁴⁷

Management frequently gave women jobs that mirrored housework. Martha Lester began working at the Red Ash Sales and Coal Company, the only female production worker among ten men. Lester's real assignment, however, had little to do with production. She shoveled coal, greased the tipple, and performed other jobs at the tipple, but cleaning the bath house and the tipple twice a day left little time for other types of work. Later, after she changed jobs, Lester realized that her pay had not been upgraded. Lester believed that the company discriminated against her on the basis of

⁴⁶ CEP News!, April 1981.

⁴⁷ CEP News!, May/June 1980.

both her gender and religion, and she realized that the discrimination began at the same time she informed the company of religious practices that affected her work schedule. As a member of the Worldwide Church of God, her religious beliefs forbade working from sundown Friday through sundown on Sunday. When she told management that she needed to change her work schedule, they told her to either go to work or go home. She refused to do either, and thereafter, she saw her job posted as “vacant.”⁴⁸

Lester called the CEP legal support office and filed a complaint in March 1977 with the West Virginia Human Rights Commission. Besides containing information concerning her job assignment and work schedule, she cited other problems she had experienced. For example, the company ignored seniority when they determined shift assignments, and a man who was hired one month after Lester was placed on day shift after a few months. The company also gave bonuses to the men but paid her the bonus only after she filed a grievance and failed to provide Lester with the same opportunity to work overtime as the men. In addition, the company did not provide adequate toilet facilities for women declaring that since they planned to lay off workers soon, the expense of building separate facilities for women was unjustified.⁴⁹

Lester received a pink slip shortly after she filed her complaint. The company cited absenteeism as the excuse for her dismissal, but the real reason behind her dismissal was retaliation. On June 26 the case was settled by arbitration. Even though the company did not admit to discrimination, company officials agreed to schedule her shifts around the Sabbath and excuse her for religious holidays, but without pay. Red Ash also agreed to build bathhouses for the women once the new plant was put into operation, not to retaliate against Lester, and to pay her back wages

⁴⁸ CEP News!, August 1980.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

and for the inconvenience caused from having to shower at home.⁵⁰

Being assigned to clean the bathhouse was not a unique job assignment for women. Letters sent to the CEP News! indicate that this was one of several housekeeping assignments given to women miners. At the Maple Meadows Mine in West Virginia, the general superintendent told them that it was not the company's responsibility to clean or maintain the women's bathhouse and so women took turns cleaning their bathhouse without pay. After they filed a grievance, the company promised to hire someone to clean the bathhouse, but at the time miner Brenda Jarrell wrote her letter to the newsletter the company still had not followed through with their promise. Management also made the women punch in at the time clock in front of the men's shower room. According to Jarrell, the men "got a kick out of seeing women see them run around naked."⁵¹

Most of the men referred to in Jarrell's letter probably thought it was amusing to see the signs of embarrassment or disgust on the women's faces as they punched in at the time clock. Other men harassed women as a way to prove their masculinity, express their anger or frustration in having women in the mine, or to scare them into quitting. Harassment by co-workers was unacceptable and difficult to deal with, but when the harasser was the boss the stakes were much higher. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, a 1981 CEP survey showed that sexual harassment by bosses was the most serious form of sexual harassment that occurred in the mines. The following additional statistics reported that:

1. 53 percent of women miners had been propositioned by a boss on at least one occasion.
2. 70 percent of those propositioned had felt "uncomfortable" or angry about it.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

3. 10 percent had been searched for cigarettes in a sexually suggestive manner.
4. 47 percent felt that they would have received a better job had they been male.⁵²

It was fairly easy to laugh off propositions or off-color jokes made by co-workers, but when the harasser was a boss the woman knew that her job was in jeopardy. Thus, the fear of retaliation carried a higher degree of emotional pressure. The EEOC ruled in 1980 that submission to sexually aggressive conduct as a condition of employment was sexual harassment, and under guidelines established by the EEOC, a worker's response to the harassment could not be used as a basis for decisions affecting employment, such as job training and advancement.⁵³

Supervisors punched, grabbed, groped, and illegally searched their female employees for cigarettes. Some women even reported that their foremen had threatened them with rape. Nevertheless, not every woman was harassed by her boss, but for those who did, the bottom line was usually "either put out or get out." Mary was the only woman employed in her mine when she was interviewed by Coal Age in 1979, and according to her, the greatest problem women confronted in the mines was their section foremen. Mary's boss repeatedly told her that the only way that she could be promoted or even keep her job was to give in to his sexual demands. In one instance he grabbed her by the collar and shook her during one of his propositions. Finally, she retaliated.

This was the third time that I had been grabbed like that. I got so mad I threw an axe back at him. Later, he asked me not to report him because he and his former wife were planning to remarry. He apologized, but that didn't make

⁵² Marat Moore and Connie White, Sexual Harassment in the Mines: Bringing the Issue to Light, (Dumfries: Coal Employment Project, 1981), pp. 2-3.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 24.

up for all the hurt I felt being done wrong like that in front of all of those men.⁵⁴

Amanda, a miner from Virginia, was attacked twice underground. Since she weighed only one hundred pounds and stood under four feet tall men doubted that she would fight back. During one incident a foreman brought in pictures of a nude prostitute, but Amanda refused to look at them. He had already been bothering her, and the pictures “really got him worked up.” Later, she was shoveling alone on a down section when he came up behind her, pinned his arms to her sides, and wrapped his arms around her so she could not kick her way free. When he started to fool with her pants, she bit him. Then he “went crazy,” picked her up, and slammed her against the rib. Hearing the commotion, one of the men ran in and screamed at him. When she subsequently reported the incident to her shift supervisor, he promised to keep them at separate locations in the mine. Amanda did not file a grievance against her foreman after fellow miners maintained that it would create further problems.⁵⁵

Women kept silent out of fear, and those who stood up to their harassers expressed distress at doing so. Supervisors excessively criticized them, further reducing the women’s self-esteem, and other women who complained were ostracized from their crews as punishment. Some bosses insulated themselves against formal redress by falsifying reports or encouraging their crews to plead ignorance. As a result, many women kept quiet for fear of being fired, blacklisted and unable to find work in other mines, and to reduce the threat of ruining their reputations.⁵⁶ Furthermore, many women miners, especially older women, were brought up to be discreet about sexuality, and they found it difficult to publicly discuss

⁵⁴ “Portrait of a Woman Miner,” CEP News!, August 1979.

⁵⁵ Sullivan, “Women Say No,” p. 76.

⁵⁶ Yount, “Women and Men Coal Miners,” pp. 460-64.

incidents such as sexual harassment.⁵⁷ Consequently, women guarded themselves against insinuations of sexual misconduct. Janet Johnson was running the supply motor at Humphrey No. 7 when one night at the end of her shift she was late taking empty coal cars to the outside. When she finally emerged, her boss insinuated that she was fooling around with a fellow miner instead of doing her job, remarking to her partner that he got out of the mine on time when he worked with the other men, but when he worked with Johnson, he was late. Johnson knew that his remarks constituted sexual harassment, but she did nothing.⁵⁸ Some women quit, but like Johnson, many more women suffered in silence. Attitudes of superintendents such as the one described by a woman who attended the UMWA conference on Women Coal Miners in 1979 discouraged women from complaining about harassment, let alone filing grievances or lawsuits. When this woman complained to her superintendent about harassment in the mine, he replied, "Only whores cause trouble in the mine." Upon leaving his office, he advised her to keep her "chest up".⁵⁹

The number of women employed underground slowly grew during the seventies. By the early eighties, with the support of the Coal Employment Project and their sister organization the Coal Mining Women's Support Team, women began to fight back against discrimination and sexual harassment. One miner, who described herself as a faithful wife and former Girl Scout, told women at a National Conference of Women Miners in 1986 that she resented being called a tramp because she was coal miner.⁶⁰ She and her mining sisters were tired of regularly having to prove their ability

⁵⁷ Sullivan, "Women Say No to Sexual Harassment," p. 75.

⁵⁸ Interview with Janet Johnson, Mount Morris, Pennsylvania, 10 July 1998.

⁵⁹ CEP News!, December 1979.

⁶⁰ Sexual Harassment Poses Problem in Offices, Mines," April-June 1986 Clippings, Box 85, fol 41, Series IX, CEP Records, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

to do the work and defend their reputations. At the same time they wanted to put in their shifts and go home without being slandered, propositioned, joked about, or attacked. With this objective in mind, women began taking coal companies to court by the early eighties. One of the most widely reported episodes of managerial sexual harassment occurred at a Consolidation Coal Company mine near Wheeling, West Virginia. The Shoemaker mine peephole case began as a tiny hole dug in the wall of a women's shower room, but the case soon attracted national attention to the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace after the women's story was broadcast on the news show "60 Minutes." Darla Baker one of the plaintiffs in the case said that when she started working in the coal industry she thought that she had to "take it." Yet when the case was over, she and countless women employed in both traditional and nontraditional occupations discovered that women do not have to "take it."⁶¹

After they discovered that mine foremen had been spying on them for two years through a peep hole drilled into their shower room, eight women employed at Consolidation Coal Company's Shoemaker No. 9 mine near Wheeling, West Virginia, decided to sue. Attorney James Bordas, Jr., filed the suit in behalf of the women in 1981. The eight women, Brenda Wansik, Sandy Dorsey, Diane Smith, Mary Lou Duffy, Edna Mayfield, Bonnie Means, Judy Simons, and Darla Baker began working at the Shoemaker mine in 1977 after a lawsuit forced Consol to begin hiring women. Two years later, they discovered that foremen had been watching them as they showered and dressed through a peephole drilled in the wall that separated their bathhouse and the Training and Equipment (T and E) room. Asking for \$5.5 million in damages, the women filed the original lawsuit on grounds of invasion of privacy alone,

⁶¹ "Women Miners, Consolidation Coal Settle Sexual Harassment Case," September 1982-October 1983 Clippings, Wheeling Peephole, Box 85, fol 8, Series IX, CEP Records, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

a much easier case to prove, but Northern District Judge Charles T. Hayden ruled that they had to bring in all of the company's alleged incidents of sexual harassment to prove the extent of their charges. As the three-day trial progressed, however, it began to resemble a rape case since the women were forced to defend themselves against attacks designed to destroy their integrity as witnesses. Mayfield stated that Consol spent over half a million dollars trying to "squash" the case. The defense strategy included using accusations that the women invited and even provoked sexual harassment on the job.⁶²

The existence of the peephole and its use by the foremen as a means of observing the women became a minor plank in the case against Consol after the focus of the trial proved to be whether or not a corporation was liable for the actions of its employees. When Judge Hayden gave the summary of the case to prospective jurors, he told them that Consol maintained that the corporation had no knowledge of the alleged harassment. Furthermore, Hayden told the jurors that the company's stated policies ran contrary to the alleged harassment, and that they would have to decide if the plaintiffs' privacy had been invaded. If it had, the jury would have to determine whether or not the invasion of their privacy caused injuries and who caused them.⁶³

The company held out little hope of disproving the existence of the peephole after Robert Steptoe's (counsel for the defense) opening remarks, for they clearly indicated that the company knew of its existence and that the women had been harassed. Steptoe listed four issues at stake in the trial: 1. the existence of the peephole; 2. whether or not anyone used it to spy on female employees; 3. who knew about it; 4. what was done about it. In fact, if it existed, he argued, Consol was

⁶² Ibid., "Women Miners Win Suit Against Company for Sexual Harassment," The Militant.

⁶³ "Female Miners' Sexual Harassment Trial Begins," Wheeling News- Register, 20 September 1982, p. 6.

not responsible.⁶⁴ More importantly, Steptoe argued that one of the most important issues centered upon whether or not the company could be held liable for the actions of its employees.⁶⁵

The peephole had been the object of rumors since 1978, and testimony from witnesses for both the defendants and the plaintiffs proved its existence. Maintenance man Sam Renzelle and Tex Berlin, superintendent of industrial relations, both testified that, upon hearing of its existence, they examined the T and E wall and located the peephole. Renzelle found the hole in 1978, but failed to report it since neither the men who showed it to him nor any of the women worked on his crew. Berlin testified that he had heard about it in October 1980, but he did not examine the wall until April 1981. Upon finding the peephole, however, he looked through it and saw a bench in the shower room. When asked by James Bordas, counsel for the dependents, if he would have been able to see if there was anyone in the shower room, he replied, "Yes, sir, it was a big hole. I couldn't have missed them (women)." Berlin also confirmed that General Superintendent Ronald Stovash checked the wall, found the peephole, and had it patched in 1980.⁶⁶ Once the existence of the peephole was established Consol's legal defense team had to convince the jurors that the company was not liable for the actions of their supervisors. If they were to succeed, the attorneys would have to paint the women as participants in inappropriate behavior. In fact, defense witnesses portrayed the women as the aggressors in numerous sexual incidents.

The women testified that the sexual harassment began on their first day of

⁶⁴ Women Tell of Harassment at Mine, Wheeling Intelligencer, 21 September 1982, p. 11.

⁶⁵ Female Miners Suffered Psychological Damage," Wheeling News-Register, 21 September 1982, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Coal Firm Begins Testimony in Suit," Wheeling Intelligencer, 23 September 1982, p. 13 and "Foremen Says Peephole Existed as Early as 1978," Wheeling News-Register, 24 September 1982, p. 1.

employment. Darla Baker told jurors that when she began working at the mine in September 1977, she was warned “not to be surprised if she was grabbed in the breast or derriere.” As discussed in Chapter 3, a union miner attacked Baker and threatened to rape her. She also testified to an incident which occurred during the summer of 1980 when Olga V. Rine, an assistant shift foreman, backed her against a wall and offered her time and a half in exchange for a date at a local motel on a Saturday. Mary Lou Duffy testified that once a foreman grabbed and patted her rear when she sat down.⁶⁷ In addition, Diane Smith testified that foremen verbally harassed and physically attacked her. In one incident a foreman grabbed Smith, broke her necklace, and dropped fire ants down the front of her shirt. Later, he apologized and replaced her broken necklace.⁶⁸

The defense counteracted by deploying strategies commonly used against women in rape cases: they attempted to refute the women’s allegations by presenting witnesses who painted the women as immoral aggressors. Several defense witnesses, moreover, denied that some of the incidents reported by the women had ever taken place. The brunt of the defense’s strategy to discredit the women was targeted at incidents that involved Diane Baker who was evidently the leader of the group. Dean Thomas, the miner who allegedly threatened to rape Baker, testified that Baker “made sexual advances” toward him, adding that after he rejected them, he “told her what I thought of her.” Nevertheless, according to Thomas, Baker grabbed him in the groin and told him that “she wanted to have sex right there.” When the two returned to the crew, Thomas testified that Baker kicked him in the groin, and in self-

⁶⁷ “Female Coal Miners Testify Male Miners Voiced Threats of Rape,” September 1982- October 1983 Clippings, Wheeling Peephole, Box 85, fol 8, Series IX, CEP Records, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁶⁸ “Women Tell of Harassment at Mine,” Wheeling Intelligencer, 21 September 1982, p. 11, and “Foremen Says Peephole Existed as Early as 1978,” Wheeling News-Register, 24 September 1982, p. 1.

defense, he grabbed her by the shoulder and pinned her to the ground. His foreman ordered him to apologize to Baker the day after the incident took place. However, Thomas claimed that he apologized only to protect his job. Donald Burgey and David Morris also testified against Baker, stating that she had also grabbed them in the groin when the three of them worked together. Morris also referred to an incident when foreman Art East teased Dorsey about her excessive use of baby powder, something he evidently witnessed through the peephole. Moreover, Morris told jurors that Darla Baker and Mary Lou Duffy put East “up to it” as a joke. Olga Rine denied offering Baker overtime in exchange for a Saturday in a local hotel. He substantiated his denial by informing the jury of the longtime friendship that had existed between his family and the family of Diane Baker. Other witnesses for the plaintiffs offered testimony that described instances when the women freely discussed sexual topics and shared sexually charged jokes with male co-workers and supervisors.⁶⁹

The defense presented three women miners from the Shoemaker mine in an attempt to refute the presence of sexual harassment in the mine. Mary Ann Yost testified that she never felt abused or harassed by the men. In an attempt to discredit her testimony attorney for the plaintiffs James Bordas questioned her about an incident in which her crew tied her up and left her alone. When he asked Yost if she considered that a form of harassment, she responded that she did not because the men were only “initiating me in a way.” Vickie Patterson concurred with Yost’s assessment of the men’s behavior towards women at the mine, maintaining that she never considered any of her co-workers’ behavior to be “abusive or harassment.” Patterson added that foul language directed towards the women was just “sarcastic ribbing” aimed to see how the women would react, for after all, men are, as Patterson claimed, “ornery and

⁶⁹ “Defense Ends Case in Mine Trial,” Wheeling Intelligencer, 24 September 1982, p. 7, and “Foreman Says Peephole Existed as Early as 1978.”

contrary.” As Moore and Rice stated in their 1981 report on sexual harassment, women define sexual harassment differently.⁷⁰ Defense witness Helen Gump told the jurors that men and women engaged in “mutual teasing” underground. She also testified that she saw Baker jump on the back of foreman Albert Mestrovic and grab him in the groin, and witnessed Baker engage in horseplay with other male workers. When Bordas asked her if she thought that the plaintiffs were abused in the mine, she said, “No, because they brought it onto themselves.”⁷¹

During the plaintiff’s rebuttal the women denied the claims put forward by defense witnesses of inappropriate, immoral behavior either underground or on the surface. Smith denied discussing anal or oral sex with female co-workers as was alleged, and Baker vehemently renounced grabbing men in the groin or jumping on the back of her foreman. Likewise, as a witness for the defense testified, Means denied having sex with a motorcycle gang. Hayden was overheard saying that there was enough evidence to present the case to the jury, but both sides settled before closing arguments commenced and agreed to abide by a gag order that forbid disclosure of the amount Consol paid the women to settle the case. In addition, Bordas agreed not to represent any clients who wanted to sue Consol on behavior that took place in the mines prior to September 27. None of the women could reveal the extent of their financial award, but one plaintiff remarked: “Put it this way. I’m not going to be able to move out of my house or go on a wild shopping spree.” According to Bordas, a settlement was discussed throughout the trial, but Consol finally offered a settlement that “we felt we could live with.” In addition, he stated that the women were

⁷⁰ Moore and White, Sexual Harassment in the Mines, p. 8.

⁷¹ “Witness Denies Sexual Harassment,” Wheeling Intelligencer, 24 September 1982, p. 9.

“elated” with the settlement. Nevertheless, “one or two” of the women would have preferred a jury decision.⁷²

Both Bordas and Baker deemed the settlement “tantamount to victory”. Although Bordas admitted that as he prepared for the trial, he did not believe that Consol would settle “in a million years,” Baker looked upon the settlement as an admittance of defeat by the giant coal company. When asked why he believed that the company agreed to settle the case out of court, Bordas asserted that Consol settled to ward off the possibility of a large award; “I think Consolidation felt it should settle. I think they felt if they didn’t, they would really be wracked.”⁷³ However, Consol did not want its dirty laundry aired either. When I ordered the case file from the federal depository in Philadelphia, I discovered that the depositions were sealed even though the case’s docket sheet failed to indicate this. Moreover, they were sealed against the wishes of the eight women who “wanted the world to know what had happened to them.” Consol requested that the depositions be sealed, however, and Judge Hayden complied with their request.⁷⁴

Sandy Dorsey, one of the plaintiffs in the Shoemaker Mine peephole case maintained that sensational cases like hers were unusual, but they did make it easier for women to pursue restitution. One company official noted that because of this case, the industry started to pay more attention to sexual harassment.⁷⁵ Corporations formulated official policies against sexual harassment during the eighties, but many supervisors and hourly workers did not understand what constituted sexual harassment in the workplace. Equally important, companies and unions attempted to

⁷² “Female Miners, Consol, Settle Out of Court,” Wheeling News-Register, 27 September 1982, p.1.

⁷³ “Woman Miner Says Settlement Is A Victory,” September 1982- Clippings, Box 85, fol 7, Series IX, CEP Records, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

⁷⁴ James Bordas, Jr., personal letter, 8 October 1998.

⁷⁵ “Sexual Harassment Cases Against Coal Companies Increase,” Coal Age 89 (November 1984): 19.

ignore the problem in hopes that it and the women would go away.

Cypress Energy hired Linda Tichnell to work at its Emerald mine after she was laid off from Humphrey No. 7 in 1996. Since Emerald previously employed few women, Tichnell and the half a dozen women recalled from a Cypress mine in Indiana have been frustrated by discrimination, sexual harassment, and the sexist attitude displayed by management personnel and union officers. Tichnell herself was sexually harassed by one of her bosses, and the responses that she has received from a local union official and management reflect their lack of experience in dealing with female miners. One boss propositions some of the women and “talks filthy” to them. During one incident a woman asked him what he wanted her to do after she had completed her job assignment. He replied, “I wouldn’t mind you giving me a blow job.” In addition, he refuses to let them run equipment, telling them that “he will get the men to do it.” When the women attempted to discuss the situation with company officials in December 1997, however, they “wouldn’t give them the time of day,” and the Human Resources supervisor declared that this boss was one of the best bosses in the mine. He further maintained that when he asked eleven men who worked at the face with the women about their complaints, they agreed with his assessment, refuting the women’s assertions. Nevertheless, the personnel supervisor promised to give the boss training on “how to talk to people.” By the time of our interview in July 1998, however, this training had not yet taken place, and Tichnell doubted that anything would occur with the harassment or the discrimination case filed against him, substantiated by her supervisor’s lack of concern over the possibility of litigation. Tichnell evidenced this when she picked up an outside phone and inadvertently overheard a conversation between him and another man. When asked about the discrimination case that had been filed against him by the women in his crew, he sarcastically replied, “Yeah, what

are they going to do, fire me?"⁷⁶

Local union officers refused to help the Tichnell or any of the women involved. One local officer even told Linda that the union could not take any action on behalf of the women on sexual harassment because it is not covered in their contract, and district officials failed to return her calls. Since the union and the company refuse to confront the problems in the mine, the women have discussed filing a lawsuit both against their boss for sexual harassment and the company for their failure to act, but, Tichnell conceded, "If you filed a case against everyone who harassed you, that's all you'd get done."⁷⁷

Management personnel at the Emerald mine are confronting the problems that accompany employing women underground that other coal companies located less than twenty miles away initially faced two decades ago. Although the number of women miners at the mine is minimal, perhaps supervisors would be wise to read the few articles published in industry journals during the the seventies and eighties on supervising women miners. However, the paucity of information available to coal industry personnel departments and supervisors reflects how little importance was paid to the successful integration of women into the mining work force, a silent testimony to the hostility some managers felt for these women. Although the number of women employed underground has dwindled, incidents of sexual harassment have not disappeared, and until company officials admit that incidents of sexual harassment take place in their mines, sexual harassment will continue to be a problem for the women who remain. Unfortunately, defining what behaviors constitutes sexual harassment continues to be a problem. In an article published in Pit and Quarry in

⁷⁶ Interview with Linda Tichnell, Garards Fort, Pennsylvania, 24 July 1998

⁷⁷ Ibid.

April 1998, Michael Heenan, a lawyer who represents mining companies in safety, employment, labor, and regulatory matters, claimed that employers are in a quandry since the lists of behaviors that constitute sexual harassment continues to grow. Consequently, many employers, according to Heenan, “do not know what constitutes sexual harassment.” Heenan further argued that employers once again find themselves “policing more employee behavior than they ever expected because of increasing problems.” Equally important, many employers are unaware that they are liable for the behavior of their employees or that a company can be sued even if the complaining employee has not been monetarily damaged as a result of the harassment. Heenan also noted that the attitudes of employers have changed during the last decade with many of them more cognizant of employee behaviors that can be regarded as sexual harassment.⁷⁸ It is difficult to believe, however, that the majority of employers, especially those from large corporations, continue to be mystified as to what constitutes sexual harassment.

The minuscule awards handed down by judges in many sexual harassment cases during this era served to minimize the message of intolerance that employers should have received. Monetary awards given to Appalachian women coal miners for sexual harassment and discrimination during the early eighties were pathetically small, usually ranging from two to five thousand dollars. In light of the ruling handed down by Judge Donald Lay in the case of the women miners employed at the Eveleth mines in Minnesota, contemporary judges consider these awards woefully inadequate. Sixteen women miners employed at the Eveleth mines in Minnesota took their employer to court for sexual harassment. They were subsequently awarded individual compensatory damages that ranged from \$2,500 to \$25,000, and the

⁷⁸ Michael T. Heenan, “Sexual Harassment,” *Pit and Quarry* 90 (April 1998):16.

company was fined \$32,000. The company appealed to the Eighth Circuit Court nevertheless but lost. District Court Judge Donald P. Lay ruled that the awards were inadequate and blamed a special master appointed by the U.S. District Court for the District of Minnesota. Lay ruled that the master misapplied legal principles regarding causation and improperly limited the plaintiff's expert testimony on emotional distress. As in the Shoemaker case, information concerning the women's personal lives was presented in court that placed the burden of proof upon the plaintiffs, not the defendants. Lay furthermore ruled that this information was neither relevant or admissible. Determined to fight, the company appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. On 26 June 1998, however, the High Court refused to hear their appeal and thereby agreed that damages awarded to the women were inadequate.⁷⁹

Considering the various multi-national corporations that own mines throughout Central Appalachia, Michael Hennen and other attorneys who represent coal companies in labor disputes should take this case and the following case against Mitsubishi as a wake-up call and ensure that supervisors know what constitutes sexual harassment and take measures to prohibit it in their mines.

Mitsubishi Motor Manufacturing of America, Inc., announced on 11 June 1998, that they agreed to pay \$34 million to the plaintiffs, both current and former females employees, to resolve an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) sexual harassment suit filed against them. The EEOC stated that this was the largest class of claimants ever to be compensated in an EEOC sexual harassment suit and the largest cash amount to be paid as restitution. As in the past, Mitsubishi, however, admitted no wrongdoing but apologized to the victims and promised to institute internal reforms aimed at creating a harassment-free work environment. The EEOC called the

⁷⁹ "The Supreme Court Rules," CEP News!, August 1998.

harassment at the plant “outrageous” and “egregious” since male auto workers reportedly grabbed female workers in the breast, buttocks, and genital areas, made drawings of female body parts and sexual acts on auto fenders and cardboard signs placed along the assembly line, and scrawled graffiti in the men’s washrooms that pertained to sexual acts and the sexual preferences of specific female workers. In addition, men described their female co-workers as “sluts” and “whores” while working alongside them on the shop floor.⁸⁰

Heenan warned his corporate readers to be vigilante in guarding the workplace against sexual harassment, especially since injured workers frequently remain silent until they face a “negative turn of events” such as the failure to get a pay raise or promotion, or they do not like the way they have been treated. He furthermore warned that the “proof” may lie in a history of employer toleration of inappropriate comments and behaviors, or a lack of responsiveness to employee complaints.⁸¹ If the Shoemaker suit, the first sexual harassment case that garnered national attention, failed to educate corporations and their employees on the parameters of inappropriate behavior, surely the Mitsubishi settlement will provide for them a clear, concise definition of sexual harassment, one that will be heard in the boardrooms of multi-national coal corporations and repeated to their superintendents and foremen in the offices and bathhouses of mines in the hollows of Central Appalachia.

⁸⁰ “Sexual Harassment Victims to Share in \$34 Million Mitsubishi Settlement,” CEP News!, August 1998.

⁸¹ Heenan, “Sexual Harassment,” p. 6.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Contemporary women coal miners hail from a line, albeit few in number, of women who had worked in coal mines for over several hundred years in America and in Europe. Historically, women worked in the pits as part of the family unit. Poor British women transported the coal from the face to the surface where women employed as boney pickers sorted the coal and prepared it for transport. During the mid nineteenth century middle class reformers clamored for legislation to prohibit women and children from working in British mines, finally succeeding in 1842 with the passage of the Mines and Collieries Act. This act banned all children under the age of ten and all females of any age from working underground. Since the law was weakly enforced, some girls continued to work in the mines into the twentieth century as trappers or pit brow lasses who helped prepare the coal for market. As mechanization decreased the number of mining jobs in Britain, the few women who remained employed acquiesced to union and government pressure to quit. Finally, the last two women left in 1972, a year before their American sisters publicly entered the mines for the first time since World War II.

American girls and women carried the British tradition of working alongside their menfolk in small, family mining operations to America. An 1821 will indicated that female slaves worked in their master's mine. By the close of the nineteenth century daughters and wives assisted their fathers and husbands in family-owned and leased mines as the Industrial Revolution pulled Appalachia into the economic and cultural mainstream. Females continued to work quietly in these family operations until wartime emergencies pushed a small number of women into larger mines. As a result, manufacturing and mining enjoyed a boom during World War I, and by 1920 nearly three hundred women worked in West Virginian mines. This number nearly doubled

during World War II. Nevertheless, the war's end signaled the return of thousands of veterans and "respectable" women went back to the kitchens where they belonged. The majority of working class women who were forced to work to supplement their men's wages or support the family as the sole breadwinner, however, had little choice but to work as poorly paid clerks, waitresses, factory workers, or clerks. Very few women remained in the mines until the Civil Rights era when equal rights legislation opened the door for women to nontraditional occupations when a ploy designed to ensure the death of a bill directed at equal opportunity for African American men turned into a golden opportunity for women.

The cornerstone of Civil Rights legislation, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, was passed and signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964. The bill was originally written to eradicate a century of racism and discrimination against African-Americans. Whether inserting the word "women" was a ploy that would surely guarantee the bill's demise or a way to protect white female workers from discrimination, the bill passed. Thus, its passage benefited both women and racial minorities. Under this act, discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin was declared unlawful.

Armed with Title VII and other pieces of civil rights legislation, women began to apply for jobs in nontraditional occupations, such as construction and mining during the early 1970s. The first woman was hired in an Appalachian coal mine in 1973. This unknown woman began working in a West Virginia mine, but her employment did not mean that the door was wide open for women to apply for jobs because coal companies grudgingly cracked open the door to women. However, The Coal Employment Project used existing law and the judicial system to force companies to hire women. Women miners increased in number during the seventies, but many realized that getting in the door was only the first, and the smallest hurdle they faced.

For as most women and the Coal Employment Project soon learned, getting in was easier than staying in the mines.

For over a century male miners worked the pits and created a unique, world underground. As a result, a coal mine was a masculine sphere which superstition and cultural norms deemed off limits to women. Although most of the women who gained mining employment lived in coal communities and knew that it would not be easy, they were ill-prepared for the physical, emotional, and psychological demands that confronted them underground. The women were thereupon physically tested as they performed heavy, manual labor and forced to endure verbal and physical harassment from their male co-workers and supervisors. By the end of the seventies the Coal Employment Project began to work in conjunction with governmental agencies and several coal companies to design and implement sensitivity training programs for women and supervisory personnel, but even the best training programs and company policies failed to curb discrimination and sexual harassment.

Empowered by several years of mining experience and support and training by the CEP, women turned to the courts for restitution for discrimination and harassment in the early eighties. These women received minuscule rewards, usually two to three thousand dollars, but at the same time these small victories encouraged the victims of sexual harassment, and increasing numbers of American companies faced lawsuits as the decade came to a close. Many of these suits focused on sexual harassment by foremen, according to many women, the female miner's worst problem underground. The Shoemaker Peephole case focused the nation's attention on sexual harassment underground in 1982. Eight women who worked the Consolidation Coal operation near Bentwood, West Virginia, discovered that their foremen had been spying on them as they showered and dressed for over two years, and in 1981 they filed suit against Consol for invasion of privacy. Before the case went to court, however, District Court

Judge Charles Hayden determined that in order to prove their case the women would have to prove the extent of sexual harassment in the Shoemaker mine. As a result the case was tried similarly to a rape case, and the women's attorney, Robert Bordas, Jr., was forced to defend his clients' reputations as Consol's attorneys painted the women as both participants and aggressors in incidents of sexual harassment. Before the case could be turned over to the jury, both sides agreed to a settlement barring both sides from discussing the financial terms, and Bordas agreed not to defend employees of Consol in similar actions that occurred before September 1982. Even though the corporate giant refused to admit guilt, the women felt partially vindicated with the settlement. However, Consol did not want its dirty laundry aired. Against the wishes of the eight women, the company's attorneys requested that the depositions be sealed, and Judge Hayden concurred. The case sent a clear but muffled message to Corporate America: be on guard against sexual harassment in the workplace, or be prepared to pay.

Today very few women remain underground in Appalachia's coal mines: the actual number of women still employed is difficult to determine. Leslie Coleman, a statistician with the National Mining Association estimated that about 4 percent of the 110,000 coal miners employed in 1992 were women.¹ However, Coleman estimates that less than half of these women remain miners today.² Many were laid off as market conditions, mechanization, and environmental legislation sent the coal industry into a decline that began during the late eighties. Other women left by choice, however. According to Donna Gearhart, a former western coal miner and "token supervisor," many women realized that they faced "the law of diminished returns" if they remained in the mines. Although they benefited from working in the mines in the

¹ "Women Miners Talk Bias at Conference," Roanoke Times, 9 July 1998.

² Telephone interview with Leslie Coleman, 21 September 1998.

short run through high wages and prestige, these benefits diminished in the long run as their bodies began to wear from the stress of hard labor. In her dissertation Gearhart argued that some occupations are gender determined because of their unique requirements, and coal mining, according to Gearhart, with its exacerbating physical labor, is one of these occupations. Since women's bodies anatomically differ from men's, Gearhart asserted, the law of diminishing returns set in earlier for women miners than it did for the men. Consequently, many women quit to retire or enter other occupations as their bodies suffered from the harsh physical demands. Like Gearhart, many women "looked at the consequences of doing that kind of work, and in most cases, made the choice not to do it anymore."³

Once again the coal industry has been re-segregated. Those women who desire employment in the mines, whether they are laid off veterans or women who have never worked underground, will have to fight to be hired. Some men, cognizant of their precarious employment, have eagerly reclaimed their territory and have no intention of letting women back in if they can help it. Cathy Willis overheard a former superintendent at Humphrey No. 7 declare that women would never again work at the mine.⁴ Carol Shephard, director of the organization Women in Mining, stated that women fail to gain employment in the mining industry today because of unions, because union seniority rules bar many former women miners from reentering mine portals since the "last hired, first fired" rule reigns in union operations. In addition, without training as mechanics or other positions that are still in demand, few women can realistically expect to be recalled and panelled to other mines. According to Shepherd, unlike women in the eastern United States, western women are

³ Dona G. Gearhart, " 'Surely A Wench Can Choose Her Own Work,' " pp. 218, 222.

⁴ Interview with Cathy Willis, Morgantown, West Virginia, 15 July 1998.

increasingly finding employment in all facets of hard rock mining because many of these mines are non-union operations.⁵

Women miners did “expand horizons of nontraditional work,” according to Marat Moore, former miner and journalist. In addition, they helped increase safety awareness and standards and strengthened labor solidarity during the labor struggles of the eighties. When they broadened the social agenda of the UMWA through their campaign for the family leave bill, women miners made a lasting contribution to the quality of life for countless working class Americans. Finally, when women entered the door to portals across the mountains of Appalachia, the doors to other formerly gendered occupations opened to both men and women.

Carol Davis, a laid off miner stated, “Once a woman miner, always a woman miner.” Many of these women have gone on to become nurses, teachers, lawyers, and truck drivers, but the experiences and lessons gained from working underground in a man's world will never be forgotten.⁶

⁵ Also see Christina A. Adamer, “Face Forward,” Mining Voice 2 (May-June 1996): 22-28, and Barbara Halpern, “Women’s Work,” Mining Voice 3 (July-August 1997):43-48.

⁶ Marat Moore, “Women Go Underground,” in The United Mine Workers of America: A Model of Industrial Solidarity? ed. John H. Laslett (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 512.

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